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GUY FORRESTER STOOD AS IF SPELL-BOUND.]

MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

CHAPTER IV.

ONLY A WOMAN'S FACE.

THE next few days passed as a pleasant dream to May Dalkeith.

The rosebud of her heart opened its fragrant leaves in the sunshine of Guy Forrester's admiration, and what she believed to be his ardent love.

How was she to doubt him when his words were so fervent and his sentiments so perfect?

But May would have been sad, indeed, had she been able to look beyond the smooth surface into the depths of the artist's mind, for she would have seen that her beauty had awakened no real love in his soul, but rather a sense of amusement at her gullibility and innocence, and an admiration of his own powers of acting.

And there can be no doubt that Guy Forrester would have made a splendid actor, and

have been altogether fitted for the life of change and excitement.

May Dalkeith, however, did not know, and the artist seemed to her to possess every good and beautiful quality which could be pressed into one human frame. Truly he knew well how to please and how to deceive her.

He quickly discovered the romantic turn of her mind, and met her ideas with others equally so.

At last May knew to the full what all nature had said to her. She understood the language of the birds and the flowers, the still lake, and the rippling brooklet.

The summer breeze, the sunshine, and the cobalt sky all whispered one word to her—

"Love!"

And the love, in its sweet first purity and ardent fire, was all for the picturesque stranger, the rising artist, who had laid all his plans to win her before they had ever met, because it was an unusual and romantic sort of thing to do, and because he thought her beauty would make him a name, and her wealth would raise his position in the world.

Yes; she bestowed her full, fresh young heart upon this pleasure-seeking worldling freely and unreservedly; and he, while he played all his cards to win her, had felt more real passion for a score of other girls before, who were May's inferiors in all points.

The strolls around the lake, the long walks to show him picturesque spots to convey to his canvas, the sittings for the full-length picture he was going to make of her for the next season's Academy, the lessons he gave her in painting, filled her days to overflowing and her nights with sweet memories and pleasant anticipations; and May Dalkeith was ecstatically happy.

She had never invited Guy Forrester inside her father's house.

It was a concession on her part to his rules and wishes; for, although she concluded that had Sir Roger been at home he would have received Lord Rangor's friend, yet she did not like to act upon her own ideas on the subject, knowing his stern and peculiar temperament.

It did not seem to have struck her that he might be equally annoyed with the intimate

intercourse which had sprung up between herself and this young man, who was an utter stranger to her only a few short days before; and had she known it, now it was too late—too late for her to take back the heart she had so freely given.

They were sitting in the little summer-house side by side, examining some of May's attempts at painting, which in his heart Guy Forrester considered quite devoid of merit, but no one would have thought so who had heard his warm praise of them, and the girl's cheeks glowed with pleasure at his commendation.

"I am so glad that you think there is something in them," she said, brightly, letting her eyes meet his with gratitude. "You ought to be a good judge. I should love to excel in the art. Do you think I ever shall?"

"Yes, if you have someone with you always who is capable of directing your studies; and, May, it would be a very pleasant task. Need I tell you I should like to undertake it myself?" and he made a captive of the small white hand, and regarded her very tenderly.

It was "May" now; the more formal greeting of "Miss Dalkeith" was quite laid aside by Guy Forrester.

"It would be useless for you to continue under the instruction of your present mistress," he went on. "There is no sign of genius in any of her work, and you will but learn her faults;" and he touched some small pictures lying upon the table with disdainful hands. "There is no transparency in her air or water—none whatever; and her outlines are as hard as millstones. Look at one of my sketches and then at hers, and you will see the difference!"

Unfastening his own portfolio he laid some of his sketches before her.

"You see it now, do you not?" he inquired.

"Indeed I do. May I copy some of yours? How beautiful they are!"

"Certainly; but when your father returns what will he say about it? He will, of course, want to know where they came from."

"I could tell him, could I not?" she asked, with a sudden suffusion of colour.

"You know best, May, what sort of a man he is; but what would you tell him, child?"

"That Lord Rangor sent you down to us to sketch; and you had lent them to me, and had been very kind," she stammered.

"Anything more, May, darling?" he inquired, tenderly, as he leaned over her so closely that his soft dark moustache brushed her cheek. "That would be a very small part of the truth, would it not, little one?"

May Dalkeith's eyes fell beneath his gaze, and he drew her nearer to him.

"May, dearest, will you tell him that the man who made the sketches loves you with all his heart, and that he wants to guide your studies through your future life? Will you tell him what bright and happy days we have spent together in his absence, and how the world is somehow a fairer and better place to us than it used to be? Will you thus go to confession, dear May?"

And he watched her ever-changing face narrowly.

"Guy," she whispered, letting her hand rest quietly in his, "I will tell my father whatever you wish; but—but I really am very much afraid of him; and suppose he is angry, and does not wish me ever to see you again?"

"Would you risk that, darling?" he inquired.

"Could I deceive papa?" she asked, with wide-open eyes. "It would not be right, would it?"

The question was answered readily.

"Can birds fly?" he mentally ejaculated, and could scarcely repress his merriment at the idea of a woman who could not deceive; but he gave no such reply to May.

He held both her hands, and looked earnestly in her face.

"May, darling, do you love your poor old

Guy enough to stand by him even through trouble?" he asked.

"Oh, indeed, indeed I do!" she whispered, shyly. "Guy, do you not know it without asking?"

"Perhaps," he acknowledged, as he turned the sweet young face up to his own. "Good heavens! little one, how exquisitely blue your eyes are!—bluer than forget-me-nots bathed in morning dew, and brighter than crystals! Do you know how beautiful you are, child?" he asked, impelled into a sudden admiration by her great loveliness.

"Am I really pretty?" she returned, her cheeks glowing with pleasure. "Do you, indeed, think so? Then I am very, very glad!"

"I do not think so, May; I am quite sure—as sure as that I mean to gain you for my wife! Darling, should you object to that arrangement very, very much?" he said, playfully, holding her away to look at her. "Oh, how I wish I could convey that expression to canvas!" as a wave of tender feeling passed over her features. It would render me famous as an artist; but, May, answer me. Will you promise to be my wife, and, having promised, will you stick to it, even against opposition?"

She smiled at him brightly.

"I promise, Guy," she said, simply. "But why should papa object? You are a gentleman, and a rising man in your profession; and he must like you. He couldn't help it."

"Couldn't he?" He laughed, amused at her naïveté, as he caught her to his breast. "At any rate, little one, we will not give him much choice. Everyone says that he is a very peculiar and obstinate man, and we must not give him the chance of saying 'no' to us. Once said, he would never take it back again."

"I believe you are right," she acknowledged.

"If we could get papa to like you for yourself, it would be all right. Could you manage that, Guy?"

"I might; who knows?" he said, strong in his self-conceit, understanding nothing of the man whose pride and prejudices he was hoping to overcome. "Look here, little woman! When he comes back I will bring him my letter of introduction, and see how we get on together. If smoothly, all the better; if not, we must give the old gentleman a little lesson in worldly wisdom—eh! sweetheart?"

"Should the worst come to the worst, we can get married without his consent, and all he will then have to do is to forgive us; so that it is all settled, one way or the other." He laughed, and he stooped and pressed his lips to the brow, white brow of May Dalkeith.

"My little future wife!" he murmured caressingly, as though she were all the world to him, and the rest of no account. "And now, small creature, which of these sketches do you wish to copy?" and he turned his portfolio round to her.

"Help yourself to what you please while I go and collect my things from the punt. See, dear, the daylight is fading, and I have to walk back to Great Orme to dinner, or supper, or whatever they call the marvellous repasts with which they regale the stranger at that uncomfortable little hotel there. Two things only keep me from leaving it—yourself, and this lovely country, and for such a combination it is worth undergoing discomfort."

"Oh! Guy, how hard it is that I cannot ask you to stay here," she broke out, regretfully.

"How I wish I could!"

"I echo your sentiment, sweetheart!" he laughed, as he raised his hat to her, and passed down the gravel path to collect his things.

And May sat looking after him with loving, admiring eyes.

"How handsome he is!" she murmured. "What a dear, splendid fellow! Papa must like him, he could not help it," and she watched him so long as he was in sight, then turned, with a little sigh at the temporary loss of him, to the portfolio before her, and took the pictures out one by one, wondering which

would be the best for her to try and copy. Beautiful as some of them were she laid them aside, afraid to venture to endeavour to produce the exquisite air tints which to him were so easy, but to her appeared so difficult. A picturesque sketch of an old church, more than half hidden by trees, arrested her attention.

She thought it pretty, and that it would be an easy subject. The spire was quaint and old-fashioned; the tower beneath, tarred almost like some ancient fortress, and it struck her as being of anything but recent date.

In the corner was the artist's name, and beneath "St. Clement's, Jersey."

Somehow the little picture seemed to attract her, and she laid it one side, looking carefully through the rest, until she had seen them all.

Stay; there was a pocket in the portfolio, which did not seem to have been opened for ages, and was struck together for want of use; but May had a fancy to open it, so she untied the strings and managed to peep in.

At first she thought there was nothing inside it, but after a few moments she discovered a second compartment within, in which lay a sheet of drawing-paper. She drew it out with eager fingers, and there before her was a rough sketch of the finest woman's face she had ever seen or pictured—a brunette, with flashing dark eyes, olive complexion and carmine-tinted cheeks, a laughing mouth, and black, arched brows.

"A perfect Cleopatra!" murmured May, bending over it, and in the corner was her lover's name, and under it the one word, "Gipsy."

Guy Forrester came singing up the gravel path the sweet refrain of "Sweethearts."

"Oh! I love for a year, a month, a day, But alas for the love that loves away!"

with a smile of satisfaction upon his features, when May Dalkeith looked up at him with interest.

"Oh! what a beautiful face, Guy!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Why did you not show her to me before? She was not a gipsy really, was she? She looks too refined to be anything but a perfect lady. Why, what is the matter, dear?" she inquired, letting the sketch fall to the ground, for Guy Forrester's momentary face had suddenly changed, and become of an ashen hue.

CHAPTER V.

THE IRONY OF FATE.

It was not long, however, before the artist recovered his presence of mind, and broke into a light laugh, although a more experienced ear than May's would have detected that it was a forced one.

"Why, where have you unearthed that old sketch?" he said, with assumed indifference. "It is years since I last saw it!"

"It was in the pocket of your portfolio; and oh! what a lovely face it is!"

"I had forgotten that it had a pocket, and—and I am sure I never placed it there," he said, thoughtfully.

"Then perhaps she did; perhaps you were teaching her as you are me, and she slipped the sketch in there unknown to you?" she suggested, innocently; "and I want you to tell me all about her; it is such a wonderful face, full of such power and possibilities. There is a laugh about those dark eyes, and yet a shadow seems to lurk in their depths. Was she a friend of yours, Guy? a great friend, this gipsy; and was she really a gipsy?"

"A gipsy! nonsense! It was a pet name, of course, given her because of her dark eyes and olive skin. As to the rest of your questions, May, they are so numerous they will be difficult to answer."

"Was she a pupil of yours?" inquired the girl.

"I never took pupils," he returned, with a

touch of annoyance in his tone. "Still, I did assist her, as I have done you, and she got on very well."

"That was good of you, and it must have been a pleasure to you to help her. Had she been in trouble, or was it the foreshadowing of it in the expression of her face which I see? I think there is something after all in the saying, 'born under an unlucky star.' That is, some of us are fated to lead sad lives. I thought I was, Guy, until I met you," and she smiled trustfully up in his face.

"And now you see the absurdity of such fancies"—oh, little woman? No; our lives are what we make them, whether they are good or evil. Shakespeare certainly said,—

'When beggars die, there are no comets seen,
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of Princes.'

But the immortal William used only a *façon de parler*. He never meant to express belief in such nonsense."

"I am not sure of that. We do not know how near we are to the unseen world, nor how its laws influence us here," she answered, dreamily.

"You have lived too much alone, May, or you would not have such morbid ideas; and now suppose I pack up my traps?" and he stretched out his hand to take the picture she had laid aside from her.

"Oh, no, not this one!" she said, eagerly. "You told me to choose which I liked best to copy, and I have selected two, this sketch and the little old church of St. Clement's in Jersey."

He absolutely started, and there was an angry glitter in his dark eyes as they met hers inquiringly.

"Why those two?" he asked, in a low, uneven tone. "There are plenty of other pictures more worthy of being copied among those before you."

There was something almost commanding in his tone, which aroused her pride, and she raised her head with a suspicion of haughtiness in the pose of her slender neck.

"You gave me my choice, and I prefer these," she replied. "I will keep them or none!"

He looked at her in astonishment, and there was a pause before he answered her.

"So, my Lady of the Lake can be wilful," he laughed. "As you wish, May; it can make no difference to me which of the sketches you select; only there is small merit in either of these."

"Nevertheless I like them," she insisted, and he packed up the others, carefully, replacing them in the portfolio in silence, while May sat with her eyes fixed upon his face, wondering what had changed him in the last few minutes.

The brightness had died out of his features, and he was very pale.

"Guy, what ails you?" she asked, laying the sketches on the table, as she rose and went over to his side, and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"I don't quite follow you, May," he responded; "there is nothing the matter with me. I am all right."

"I am glad of that," she said, but the look of anxiety did not quite leave her face.

"And now, little woman, good-bye. If I don't go I shall never be back before dark," and he held out his hand to her.

"Have I vexed you?" she asked, looking at his clouded brow.

"May, how absurd you are this evening!" he said, irritably. "What make you think so?"

She answered his question with another.

"Don't I usually walk a part of the way with you?" she asked.

"Pray come, by all means, if you like," he returned. "I was afraid of the dusk overtaking you—that is all."

"Then I will go," she said, and led the way out of the summer-house.

But the walk proved a less pleasant one than usual.

A shadow seemed to have fallen between them, which to May was inexplicable; but to Guy Forrester that shadow from the past was a very real and tangible thing.

It was not often that shadows of any sort affected the artist much; he was too gay and debonaire to give many thoughts to the days which had gone away into Eternity's vast circle.

No regrets burdened his airy mind. The sins he had committed, and the sorrows he had caused, did not affect his peace at all.

It was only when the consequences of his actions rebounded unpleasantly upon himself that Guy Forrester was in the least bothered by them.

The beautiful brunette with the fanciful name of the Gipsy had once filled a page of his life; but since then he had turned the page over, and well-nigh forgotten it; and it was not agreeable to him to have it ruthlessly brought to light, even though it was written in cypher, and no one but himself could read the history contained therein.

He hoped and believed that the key to that cypher was lost for ever, and that the old tale, with its romance, its pleasures, and pains, was dead and past revival.

That May should have any inkling of the old story he knew was impossible, and that it was chance, or fate alone, which had caused her to hunt out the forgotten pocket in his portfolio, and to select the sketch of the Gipsy's head and St. Clement's Church as the subjects for her copies.

It must be chance, but it was decidedly annoying. Could it be fate?

Pshaw! He told himself that he was becoming as fanciful as May Dalkeith, and he shook himself impatiently as though he would free himself from all morbid ideas.

"May," he said at length, "I really think you will be belated if I let you go any further."

"I am not afraid of that," she replied. "I know my way; and, besides, the glow of the setting sun has not left the West. However, I will go back now. Good-night, Guy," and she held out her hand to him.

He clasped it in his own, looking down at her. The ruddy hue from the sunset was touching her cheeks, and rendering her even more lovely than usual, and there was a far-off, distant look in the great blue eyes, as though she was gazing past the present into the mysteries of the future; and perhaps she was, dimly, very dimly, with a prescience of coming evil, too slight and shadowy to be in any way relied upon.

"Addio," he returned, lightly, as he lifted her fingers to his lips in a courtly fashion; "or rather *au revoir*, sweetheart; to-morrow we meet again at the old place."

"Yes, at the old place; *au revoir*, Guy," and she lifted her face almost timidly to his. "Am I not to have my good-night kiss?"

"Of course, little one. I hesitated because you seemed vexed with me."

"Not so; to my mind it is on the other hand," she laughed.

"Ah! well, we will not quarrel upon the subject. If either of us has shown temper, let us kiss and be friends; shall we, May, darling?"

"Yes, we will kiss and be friends!" she replied, happily, and clasping both her arms about his neck, she suited the action to the word, and kissed him with queenly, responsive love.

"Little one," he whispered, "I wonder where the clouds came from into our clear sky? Was it all about two stupid little pictures, which were not worthy to be classed with the others at all? We men and women are really after all nothing but children of a larger growth. Put the sketches behind the fire, May, and to-morrow I will bring you a picture for you to keep, and to copy too, if you will; and it is one which I feel sure you will both like and value."

"Are you really doing one for me, Guy? Now, that is good of you, and I shall so greatly value it," she answered, brightly.

"And you will not be vexed with your poor old Guy again, because he does his best to direct your studies?"

"I am not vexed, dear!" she said.

"Then the clouds are past?" he asked, tenderly. "Don't let them come back, Hawthorn."

"Hawthorn! I like that name," she replied.

"No one else has ever called me by it; but you may do so, Guy."

"May I? Then I will; but, child, look at the sky! If our clouds have cleared away, they are gathering quickly overhead. Will you get safely home before the storm breaks? It is travelling your way, little one."

"So it is," she answered. "Guy, do you believe in omens—the storm coming after the clouds? Oh! I hope they will not do so in our lives."

"Hawthorn, you are as superstitious as an Eastern Princess, and that is saying a good deal. If you are afraid, I will go back with you."

"I am not afraid. I do not think I am a coward, Guy. I should not shrink from facing danger if it came my way. A wetting won't hurt me, at any rate; but I will have a run, and avert even that, if possible," and she turned as she spoke.

"What, May, going without a last kiss after all!" he said, playfully, and the girl waited to give him another warm embrace, then fled down the hill-side with the speed of a lap-wing.

Guy Forrester cast one hasty glance at the angry Heavens, which but a short time ago were tranquil enough.

Great black-clouds were rolling up, each darker than the other, over the surface of the sky, with a fierce red light where the sun had sunk.

"Poor girl, I fear the storm will overtake her," he murmured, as his eyes followed the lithe figure speeding along in the waning light. "Is it an omen after all? Was May Dalkeith right?" and as though a Higher Power replied to that question in the affirmative, a heavy peal of thunder crashed out with such suddenness over his head as to make him start.

He saw that it brought May to a standstill. Then to reassure him as to her courage, she turned, and fluttered her white handkerchief in the breeze, before she again sped on at her fleetest pace. But great raindrops began to descend upon her fast and thick. Guy stood watching her quickly-receding form with strangely mixed feelings.

He began to think he was growing very proud of his beautiful Hawthorn, and hoped fervently that no harm would come to her; and yet he was fully aware that his affection for her was as water to rich, full wine, when compared to what he had felt for the Gipsy.

And yet he now knew that of that great passion there was not one flame, not one ember left burning.

And he stood there, not disgusted with his own fickleness, but regretting the fact that the pleasures of love were so short-lived.

May Dalkeith was out of sight. The fury of the tempest had all gone her way. One startling clap of thunder had come to him, and a few raindrops bespattered his velvet—that was all.

And he walked on towards St. Ormo with a pleasant "good-night" to the country folks he met on his way.

Yet he could not quite shut out from his mind the strange coincidence of May's selection from his collection of sketches.

"Gipsy and the old church!" he murmured. "Surely it was the irony of fate! And yet—and yet, her choice must have been the merest chance!"

And he tried to dismiss the subject from his mind.

CHAPTER VI.

GUY FORRESTER STOOD AS IF SPELL-BOUND.

MAY DALKEITH did not escape the storm. It broke upon her with fury, driving her before its fierce blast in an ugly fashion, and the rain beat upon her defenceless head until her light garments were fairly drenched.

However, she ran on at her fleetest pace, and reached home in an incredibly short time; but before going in she went to the summer-house and collected her sketches, and those of her drawing-mistress and Guy Forrester, and carried them in her portfolio into the house.

The pretty dining-room was lighted up, and she stopped before the window and looked in, attracted by its homelike and comfortable appearance.

The red shade over the lamp was casting a warm glow upon the well-appointed table, which was arranged with flowers and fruit, although the supper laid out was only for one, and of the simplest description.

"How cosy it looks!" whispered May to herself, and sped on to the porch, where she found the old housekeeper absolutely wringing her hands in her trouble at her absence.

"Oh! Miss May, where have you been?" she inquired, with the freedom of an old servant who had seen her grow from childhood to womanhood. "I have been in a pretty state of mind about you out in this storm. Why, bless me! you are wet through, my dear!"

"Yes, I am, Mrs. Wheeler; but don't look alarmed. I shall not take any harm."

"Oh! dearie me!" cried the old woman. "What would Sir Roger say if he were here?"

"Well, he is not here, Wheeler, and what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve about."

"That is all very well, my dear, but if you were to be ill?"

"I'm not going to be ill," laughed May.

"You shan't if I can help it," returned the housekeeper; "but you must come and take off your wet things immediately, and I'll give you your supper in bed. A nice fire in your room, and a hot bottle, may save a cold off." And she bustled upstairs and lighted one herself.

May groaned.

"Here we are just in June, and I am to have fires and hot bottles!" she said, but it was of no use to complain; the old housekeeper was obdurate, and she did not rest till she had put May to bed, hot bottle and all, and then she brought her up her supper and some hot port wine negus, and would not go away until she had partaken of both; and in all probability Miss Dalkeith had to thank her humble friend for exemption from a severe chill after the drenching she had received.

Anyway, May quickly fell asleep, and when the housekeeper peeped in, some time later, she was sleeping and smiling as peacefully as a young child.

"Poor darling! She has had a sad life of it," murmured the woman, looking down upon the sweet, young face. "But she's going to be happy at last, I hope. Some folks might say as it was my duty to acquaint Sir Roger with it when he comes back, and it would be right with most fathers; but, poor lassie, not with him. He'd very soon put a stop to love's young dream; the words have no meaning to such as him, and it's my belief never had. No, I was young once myself, and had a lover of my own, who made me a good husband too, and I hope she'll be as happy as I was," and with tears in her eyes Mrs. Wheeler crept away.

May Dalkeith did not awake till the sun looked in at her windows, and then she found she was none the worse for her escapade of the previous evening.

She would not be called for half-an-hour yet, so she lay in the sunshine thinking. And of course her thoughts turned to her absent lover as the needle to the pole, and her young

heart glowed with pleasure and admiration as she pictured his love and his many perfections. But suddenly her happy thoughts were broken in two.

Her eyes fell upon her portfolio, and the scene of the day before was reproduced in her mind.

She remembered her selection of Guy Forrester's sketches; his return, and the very song he was singing as he came along the gravel walk, his sudden agitation, and changed looks; and the question occurred to her, what connection there could have been between her lover and the gipsy?

She had heard of broken engagements and hopeless love affairs, but she deemed that if ever Guy had had such he ought to tell her.

Why should the sight of the beautiful, dark face have affected him so greatly unless he cared for her still, and if so? But no, that was impossible.

Guy Forrester loved her with all his heart, and she had promised to be his wife, from whom he would have no secrets.

No, there must be nothing hidden between Guy and herself. She felt sure that he, with his great love and elevated ideas, would not think it right any more than she did.

She would ask him to tell her all about the owner of the beautiful dark face, and if Gipsy were his friend she would take her into her own heart for his sake.

And May felt more contented when this decision was arrived at. Then she was disturbed in her reflections by the entrance of Mrs. Wheeler with her breakfast.

"Oh! you really spoil me!" cried the girl, sitting up amid the wealth of her splendid dark hair. "I was only waiting for my bath water to get up."

"Well, Miss May, after the wetting you had last night I thought you would be better in bed this morning. Do you feel any the worse for it, my dear?"

"Not one bit," laughed May, brightly; "and your hot negus made me sleep like a top!"

"So much the better, and when you have had your breakfast you can get up as soon as you please;" and she set the tray beside her upon the bed.

"Why, there's a letter!" exclaimed May. "Yes, miss—it's from Sir Roger. I suppose it is to say that he is coming home."

The hand which May Dalkeith had eagerly stretched out to pick up the missive remained suddenly stationary, and a look of dismay came into the sweet blue eyes, while her face visibly paled.

The widow, who once had loved, understood the symptoms readily, and took the small white hand into her own.

"Miss May," she said, very earnestly, "don't be downhearted. We servants ain't blind, though it is our duty to pretend to be; and there's not one at St. Ormo Cottage who would get you into trouble to save their lives—not one, believe me. I don't hold with deceiving parents, my dear, but there are some as one can't confide in, and if you feel as you can't, dearie, who can blame you? And if there's one who you love, and who loves you better than all the world besides, be happy—whether you have your father's permission or no. There! I've said enough to lose me my place here; but I don't care, and if I can help you, Miss May, I will. So trust in me. I hope you don't think I have taken a liberty in saying what I have done."

"Indeed, no; I am most grateful to you," replied the girl, holding the old woman's rough red hand in both her own. "Oh! Wheeler, I do hope papa will like Mr. Forrester. What shall I do if he does not?"

"That's not for me to say, my dear; but I know what I did when my father said 'no' to my sweetheart. I ran away with him, and when once the wedding-ring was on, father couldn't get it off again, so he had the sense to see it was of no use quarrelling about it, and he and my Bob became the very best of friends after that, so long as they both lived.

But they have each gone to a better country now, Miss May."

"Ay, and so has my angel mother," responded the girl, tears rising to her blue eyes. "Those we have loved and lost seem to become our links to the beautiful great unknown world. 'Don't you think so, Wheeler?'"

But the housekeeper did not seem to be just then in the mood for sentiment. She looked at May doubtfully, as though wondering whether the question in her mind had better be spoken or no. May caught the truth in her eyes, and bade her speak her thoughts.

"Well, my dear, I was hesitating whether to speak; but what I was going to say is, 'Are you sure your mother is dead?' There! now I have scared you!" she added, regretfully, for May had turned upon her two startled orbs and a white face.

"If not, where is she?" she asked in a low voice. "I always thought she died before we came here."

"Has Sir Roger ever told you so?"

The girl shook her head.

"He will not let me talk of her."

"Ah! there's generally fire where one sees smoke, and people do whisper that she is still alive," returned the woman, very gravely.

A look of deep joy overspread May's features.

"Oh! Wheeler, if you could only find out the truth—if I could but see her! I am sure I can remember her face, and it was so beautiful, so sweet, and good! I have indeed longed for her, but I have always pictured her as my guardian angel—not in human form."

"Well, perhaps she is, my dear; but people will talk, and one can't stop them."

"What do they say?" inquired May, regarding the housekeeper keenly.

"Say! Why, that she is alive somewhere!"

"But where?" persisted the girl.

"Ah, there I can't help you! They never get so far as that. And now I will leave you to eat your breakfast and read your letter," and Mrs. Wheeler trotted away.

"Not dead!" said May, thoughtfully, looking far away with unseeing eyes. "Oh, mother, mother! if I could but find you! How I want your love!" she added, with a catch in her voice, and she started from her reverie at the sight of her father's letter lying upon the breakfast-tray.

She had almost forgotten it, but now she took it up with eagerness.

"When he returns I will ask him in plain words whether she is dead or alive," she said, decidedly, as she broke open the seal with which the letter was fastened. "Coming home!" she murmured, and the paper fell from her hands. "Oh! how I wonder whether he will like Guy, my darling, darling Guy! To-morrow he says he will be here, so this will be our last happy day together!" and she little dreamed how prophetic and how near the truth her words were.

She ate what she could of her breakfast, then got up and rang for her bath to be prepared, and began her toilet in a very thoughtful mood.

The sun was shining brilliantly, and for a time she stood looking out of her window at the pretty garden and the beautiful lake beyond, and after a while she put on her hat, picked up her portfolio, and went down the stairs, through the hall, and out into the summer-house, and, arranging a little easel upon the table, she placed upon it the beautiful head of "Gipsy," and sat gazing at it for a length of time with an earnest, interrogating look, to which the inanimate sketch could in no way reply, although the picture was full of vitality and life.

Presently she placed it on one side, and, arranging her drawing-board, she began to copy it, as though she were inspired.

Never before had May Dalkeith worked with such goodwill or so much talent. The face which looked back at her from those wonderful dark eyes, in which the sadness and the mirth seemed so strangely mingled,

was an exact copy of the sketch done by Guy Forrester.

She grew absolutely excited over her success, and so absorbed was she in her work that she did not hear her lover's advancing footsteps.

Guy Forrester stood as if spell-bound. He had not believed May capable of producing any lifelike effect as an artist, and here she was working with absolute "verve" at this picture, repeating with wonderful truth the lifelike portrait of a woman whom he desired to put for ever out of his memory.

He had hoped that May would have respected his wish, and put the object of their dispute behind the fire; but the idea that he had really desired her to do so had not once occurred to her mind.

Had May seen the expression of her lover's face as he gazed from behind her over her shoulder at her work, she would have been startled.

It was thoroughly changed, and Guy Forrester looked twenty years older than he had done a few minutes before as he walked up the garden-path.

He moved nearer to her in his endeavour to see all May had done, and his shadow fell across the beautiful face; and, as it did so, May saw it, and uttered a low cry, so at tension had her nerves become. Then her lover moved forward with a smile.

"What! afraid of a shadow, May?" he said, raising his hat to her. "Let me congratulate you upon a wonderful success. I really can scarcely tell which is the original and which the copy."

And he took her hand into his own, and held it.

(To be continued.)

JUDITH.

—O—

CHAPTER XXIX.—(continued.)

THOUGH Johnson's heart beat fast his lips were tightly pressed together, and betrayed no sign of weakness, as, with a resolute movement, he crossed the space between them and caught her to his breast.

"Judith, do you love me at last?" he cried.

Even then she managed to veil her hatred and horror of him who held her in his arms, whose breath on her cheek caused her a deadly chill, as though some noxious vapour were inhaled.

She never winced, never spoke a denial of his words, only in her heart she told herself that the bitterness must pass away; it could not last for ever.

Even then he doubted, and releasing her with no very gentle touch, took her face between his hands, and forced her to look into his eyes.

Concealment was then no longer possible; the intolerable loathing expressed in her glance was not to be mistaken, not to be glossed over by any words.

He knew he had been fooled, and with a muttered oath pushed her away from him at the very moment the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Sherston appeared on the threshold.

"Come at once, Winifred is dying," she sobbed, breathlessly.

Not until the words had left her lips did she see that Mr. Johnson was not alone. Judith was in his room, had been in his close proximity before warned, perhaps, by some sound of her approach they started guiltily apart.

It was perhaps natural she should misinterpret the situation—natural she should feel outraged at the apparent want of maidenly modesty and good feeling in Judith being there at all, alone in the room with her daughter's betrothed, when her daughter was dying.

Whatever she thought she said nothing, only glared stonily, and held back her skirts as

though from contamination, when with a stifled exclamation the girl fled swiftly from the room.

When she reached Winifred's bedside, Judith was there already, kneeling down beside it, her face buried in the clothes; and Johnson, who had followed her in, took up his position some distance off, his arms folded, a gloomy expression on his sharp, sinister face as he surveyed them.

For some time there was not a sound, and the room, carefully darkened, might have been peopled by shadows, so motionless were they all; then Winifred opened her eyes, and looked round languidly.

Perhaps the solemn silence told its own tale, or the mere fact that everyone was gathered round the bed made her understand how critical was her case. She looked with pathetic earnestness in her father's face.

"Am I going to die?" she articulated, with difficulty.

"Pray Heaven not, my darling!" he answered, brokenly, but Mrs. Sherston, bursting out into a very passion of grief, gave the lie to his despairingly expressed hope.

The pupils of Winifred's eyes dilated for a moment; then, as she looked round pitifully, and her glance fell on the face of the man who was to have been her husband on the morrow, her eyelids drooped with a faint shiver, a sigh as of relief, her lips parted in something like a smile, and presently she murmured one word,—

"Saved!"

Only Judith, who had been watching intently, understood from what, and knew that, in spite of her first instinctive shrinking from the unknown, she was glad to die.

She never spoke again.

All through the night she lay apparently unconscious, while quietly and peacefully her life slowly ebbed away, so painlessly that they never knew when she was dead.

As the grey dawn showed through the open uncurtained windows, Dandy raised his head and gave a piteous whine.

Then all was confusion, and Mrs. Sherston wept and raved, refusing to be comforted; and as the Commissioner fell across the bed and sobbed aloud in the agony of his sorrow and remorse, Judith slipped away, too dazed then, too terribly surprised, for tears.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT HER GRAVE.

IN India burial follows so soon after death that, until the last mournful rites are over, one has scarcely leisure to indulge in grief.

Later that same day Judith was out gathering flowers, and crept quietly into the room where the dead girl lay, with the skirt of her black gown full of pure white blossoms, her face as white as they, but her eyes still hot and tearless, having scarcely realised as yet what had happened.

Nor was there anything to open the flood-gates of her sorrow in the peaceful face which met her view as tenderly she raised the corner of the sheet.

The features which in life had been worn and troubled, even fretful in their expression at times, were ennobled now by an unutterable calm—a happiness that could only have been gained by death.

The smile on her lips was so sweet and childlike that Judith involuntarily stooped and kissed her, shuddering a little at the icy coldness of the contact, and startled by a low growl from under the bed.

It was Dandy, who had lain there all day, and who, at a caressing word, came out, dragging himself along the ground in pitiful dejection.

As Judith stroked his head he raised himself on his hind legs and waved his paws forlornly to and fro, begging for he knew not what.

At the same moment the door opened and Lady Sherston entered, looking harder and

more forbidding than ever in her funeral robes.

Her eyes gleamed coldly as they rested on Judith and the dog.

"This is neither the time nor place, Miss Holt, to be amusing yourself. Take that little wretch away, and stay in your own room until I send for you."

Mechanically Judith obeyed the mandate.

As she rose the flowers fell to the ground, and as she left the room with Dandy in her arms she saw that Lady Sherston had pushed them away with her foot, evidently with the intention of denying her the small satisfaction of knowing they would be accepted as a tribute of affection.

A doubt entered her mind whether the woman was human, that she could be so remorseless at such a time; but a heartbroken cry, that reached her ear a moment later, drove that idea from her mind.

Whatever Lady Sherston's cause for hatred of herself, however hard and unbending she might seem to be, there was one soft spot in her nature of which even she herself might never have been aware had it not been for this disaster.

In spite of her coldness and apparent neglect she must have loved her daughter dearly, or she would not have suffered so, not, perhaps, felt so bitterly towards Judith for her supposed disloyalty to her friend.

The funeral was two hours later, and having received no summons to attend, Judith was still alone in her room, with Dandy on her knee. But when she saw the procession pass she could not restrain herself; and hastily tying up the dog, caught up her hat and ran out, intercepting it by a short cut through the compound.

Mrs. Trevor's carriage was following, and, with a sad little nod and smile, its occupant stopped and took her in.

"It is too terrible! I can scarcely believe it!—and this her wedding-day!" she whispered, and began to sob.

Not attempting to join her in her grief, nor to assuage it, Judith sat quietly beside her, the same hard expression on her face, feeling that not if it would save her life could she weep.

The distance to the cemetery was not a long one, and as they came near they saw a crowd of natives had gathered there, partly from curiosity, and partly from respect to the Commissioner.

Sir Julius took his place by the clergyman at the head of the grave, and Judith thought she had never seen him look so ill and wretched, so little conscious and proud of his position, as now, when, for the first time, he wore his new honours in public.

Lady Sherston looked colder and more dignified, but a wild expression in her eye showed that the composure was only outward, that it was only by a strong effort she kept back her emotion.

Not until the service was nearly over did the Commissioner catch sight of a face among the crowd that caused a wave of colour to suffuse his thin features, as he leant more heavily on his stick.

It was his outcast brother, on whom he had not set eyes since the day—now nearly twenty-four years ago—when he reproached him for winning away the love of the only woman for whom he had ever cared.

And that woman saw him too, and looking from one to another, realised, as she had never done yet, what harm her falseness and frivolity had wrought; feeling at that moment as though not even the happiness that she had missed could have consoled her for having made so terrible a wreck of a fellow-being's life.

There were no tears, no lamentations over Winifred's grave; even Mrs. Trevor, who had been inclined to weep, felt hardened into momentary composure, and when the last prayers were spoken there was a general sense of relief.

As Sir Julius moved away his brother fol-

lowed and touched his arm. He had carefully abstained from any oriental effect in his attire, and no outsider could have guessed how strange and terrible a story was connected with the man, who, notwithstanding his still handsome features, and well-knit figure, looked commonplace to a degree, so important are the adjuncts of civilisation—and clothes.

"You will shake hands, Julius—here—and after all these years?"

Unhesitatingly the Commissioner extended his hand.

"I bear you no grudge, Gerald. I am sorry for you; with all my heart I am sorry for you."

"And I for you," was the unexpected reply. "With all your advantages of wealth and honours I doubt if you are happier than I!"

He spoke in his ordinary voice, and Sir Julius turned round nervously, to see if anyone were within earshot, and as he did so his glance encountered first the new-made grave, then his wife, rigid and (so far as he had ever known) unloving, and, lastly, Mr. Johnson, who at the same moment moved towards him.

Never having known the younger Sherston well in the old days, he did not recognise him now, and came on with a manner carefully modulated to the proper amount of solemnity and regret, even as his husband was the exact width which he would be required to wear on so melancholy an occasion.

"Had we not better close this trying scene?" he hazarded, with a slight accent of authority in his tones.

Gerald Sherston detected it at once, and fixed him with a look so full of cool superiority and scorn, that his attention was arrested, and, subsequently, his fears aroused.

"Have we met before, sir?" he asked un- easily.

"Twenty-three years ago, when you were in a very different position from that which you hold now. Rogues need to have good memories, and yours is a bad one, I am afraid, Mr. Michael Stranghan?"

The man gasped for breath, so unexpected was the attack, so impossible to rebut.

He took the Commissioner by the arm and pressed it significantly to enforce his aid; but even before he felt the touch, Sir Julius Sherston had grasped the emergency, and interposed hastily,—

"For my sake forbear. No recriminations can do any good to you and to me. They may work incalculable harm."

His brother gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

"You need not be afraid; I shall not interfere with either of you. To save her," with a gesture indicating the place where Winifred lay at last in peace, "I would have spared no pains, but now that her fate has been taken out of our hands, I have no further interest in the matter. So far as I am concerned, you need not anticipate danger."

With no action of farewell he walked away, and not until he had traversed some paces did he raise his hat, and then as he did so smiled to think how easily the usages of society, so important in themselves, are forgotten or become a thing of naught.

How thick is the cloak of civilisation, in which we wrap ourselves so closely, that every movement is fettered! And yet, if once we divest ourselves of it, how small and pitiful a garment it seems, how little worth the trouble it cost us to keep intact.

Gerald Sherston at that moment felt himself immeasurably the better, nobler man of the three who had been speaking together, notwithstanding that his home was in a bazaar, and that he was out off from his fellows for ever.

With Winifred, the last slight link that had bound him to them was broken, and he would trouble them never again.

Forced along with the crowd that were gradually making their way out, Judith had found herself in close proximity to him as he spoke his last words.

He never saw her, but she heard what he

said distinctly, and knew that once more hope was gone, that she must expect no further help from him; yet at the moment it seemed of no account, for since Winifred was dead she did not care. Not for her own sake had she desired revenge.

Johnson glanced at her triumphantly, and she returned his gaze with indifference, moving away to join Mrs. Trevor, who was waiting. Both women were utterly silent during the slow drive home, and at the Commissioner's door parted with merely a good-bye.

Judith went straight to her room, and had dinner brought to her there, trying to tempt Dandy with the daintiest bits, but in vain.

The little dog with his tail in dismal uncurl lay on the ground, looking pitifully into her face, and whined sorrowfully when asked to eat or drink. Judith having despised him somewhat as being one of the lap-dog species, with little or no character of which to boast, felt penitent, and tried to comfort him as well as she could, and in so doing soothed her own troubled thoughts.

The next morning dawned brightly, and Judith awoke, feeling desolate indeed, having lost her only friend in India; yet with a strain removed from her mind.

The struggle had been so unequal, her anxiety on Winifred's account so great, it had been so hard also to know what to do for the best, that to have the Gordian knot cut for her, even in so terrible a fashion, savoured something of a relief.

Surely it were better she should have died—there being so little to bind her to life—than have become the wife of such a man as Johnson—a low-born adventurer, who had only succeeded by dint of cunning and unscrupulousness.

Soon after breakfast she was summoned by the Commissioner to his private room, and she was a little surprised to find he was not alone. Lady Sherston stood behind his chair and Mr. Johnson sat at a little distance, looking over a newspaper with evident lack of interest.

Judith felt an instantaneous conviction that she was brought there to answer some charge, or to receive a rebuke on account of her conduct on the night before Winifred's death.

Sir Julius's manner did nothing to remove this impression. He was palpably ill at ease, and fidgeted with the pen he was holding for some seconds before he spoke, Lady Sherston still maintaining a grave silence behind him.

"I am deeply grieved, Miss Holt, to have to speak to you on so painful a subject," he began. "I would rather let it appear to you as to the outside world that you were dismissed because your services were no longer required. I am not sure if it is my duty—"

Lady Sherston interposed sharply, as he hesitated,—

"It is your duty to put aside all such scruples! Miss Holt deserves to be known by everyone for what she is—a wicked, designing woman, whom no scruples can restrain; who had the indelicacy to flirt with my daughter's lover when she lay dying!"

"Of what am I accused?" said Judith, faintly.

It was Sir Julius who answered.

"My wife spoke very plainly; you could scarcely mistake her meaning. She tells me you were found by her in Mr. Johnson's room alone, almost in the dark, and in his arms."

"And if I were—supposing it were true—need that necessarily be all my fault?" faltered Judith. "I think I could explain if you would let me; my behaviour was not so bad, not so unpardonable, as you might think!"

"She is accusing you!" cried Lady Sherston, fiercely, turning to where Johnson sat, an apparently unbiased listener to what was going on.

He shrugged his shoulders now with the air of one who, where a woman was concerned, preferred not to defend himself; and his expression of magnanimity sat so strangely on him that even Lady Sherston became con-

scious of its incongruity, and was irritated by it.

"It is nonsense your pretending such generosity. It is your duty to speak out—your duty to my dead child!"

"Then I will do so. I have put myself entirely in your hands, and for Winifred's sake, as you say, it is necessary my character should be cleared. Ask Miss Holt if she came by invitation to my room, and if it was entirely without encouragement that I embraced her?"

Judith was silent. What could she say in answer that would exonerate her from the charge?

It was true that she had gone to him of her own accord, and led him on to the madness of that hateful caress; but could she ever explain the motives which had been responsible for her conduct, and would they ever believe that she had been single-minded throughout?

"Well?" said Lady Sherston, impatiently. "Has Mr. Johnson spoken truth or not?"

Judith made a little despairing gesture with her hands.

"It is all true so far as it goes, but listen to my excuse. Winifred was unhappy, was dying because she did not care to live to be that man's wife. That was the reason I appealed to him to release her, and when all prayers had proved vain I tried to win him away by artifice, by pretence of listening to a love he once professed for myself."

Her words, so earnestly were they spoken, carried a momentary conviction to her hearers.

There was dead silence for a moment, and husband and wife looked at each other questioningly, then suspiciously at their guest. He, however, was equal to the occasion.

"You are trying my patience to the uttermost," he remarked, with a little gentle sigh. "I feel desperately tempted to ask you if it was by Winifred's wish you resorted to such very extreme measures? It is only in reverence to her memory that I refrain. I will not throw a doubt on her love and loyalty to me; only in common justice to myself, I must remind you that I at least was a free agent. If I had loved you, why should I have wished to marry her, being rich enough to avoid the imputation of mercenary motives?"

Lady Sherston was quick enough to seize the clue thus cunningly held out.

"The matter to me requires no explanation," she observed, sourly. "Whether or no Miss Holt felt any personal predilection for my daughter's lover, it is evident she had a keen eye to the advantages an alliance with him would offer. All the nonsense she has talked of saving Winifred from a loveless marriage may be taken for what it is worth!"

With wide open reproachful eyes Judith surveyed her, scarcely believing that any woman could be so utterly without charity, nor that so soon after her daughter's death she could treat with such cruelty that daughter's friend.

To defend herself was hopeless; she could only submit in silence, but the scornful curl of her upper lip expressed something of what she felt.

Sir Julius Sherston drew a cheque-book towards him and wrote something rapidly, across one of its pages.

"Miss Holt must permit us to make pecuniarily good to her the suddenness of her dismissal. She may remain some time without employment, and no one could possibly have anticipated such a termination to her visit here."

He spoke stiffly, and Lady Sherston, with quick appreciation of the girl's position, showed that she was not utterly without heart by adding in a gentler tone,—

"And remember, Miss Holt, until you have made other arrangements your room is at your disposal. Whatever your faults Winifred always liked you, and would have been grieved could she have known what has occurred. We would not turn you out at a moment's notice. Indeed, Sir Julius and I would be most happy to defray the expenses

of a passage home, should you wish to return to your friends."

"Most happy," the Commissioner hastened to supplement.

But Judith's lips showed no abatement of her contempt, no softening towards them on account of their increased friendliness.

"I will not rest another night under your roof! I will not accept one farthing more than the salary to which I am entitled! I wish I could refuse even that—for all that I have done for Winifred has been done for love, not money—but that would leave me penniless, and I cannot afford to indulge my pride!"

Silently the Commissioner wrote another cheque, and pushed it towards her, watching her deprecatingly as she folded it up and put it in her pocket.

Crowding quickly through his mind came many memories of the times he had seen the two girls, their arms linked, their faces close together as they studied the same subject, or enjoyed the same joke, and he could scarcely master his emotion.

Though she might have been false in this one instance, where her own interests were involved, surely she had been true in her love for Winifred, tireless in her attendance upon her. And again, were they right in taking, as evidence against her, the testimony of a man whom he at least knew to be untrustworthy and wicked to his heart's core?

He rose from his chair, and half stretched out his hand.

"Let it all be forgotten, and, for Winifred's sake, stay with us still!" he cried, impulsively; but in a moment his wife's hand was laid heavily on his arm, all her old doubts as to his unfaithfulness being revived by the earnestness in his voice.

"This is mere weakness, and unworthy of you!" she said, sternly. "Remember what is due to your wife, and let the girl go!"

The moisture which had started into Judith's bright blue eyes at the unexpected kindness was quickly brushed away, and, with head erect, she gave Sir Julius her hand.

"Good-bye," she said, gently. "I believe you have always meant to be good to me, and I am grateful for even the intention. It encourages me to ask you a favour. May I have Winifred's dog? You never cared for it, or I would not ask, and I think it will be happier with me."

"Certainly you shall have it; and let me know if I can do anything for you at any time," he answered, and this time boldly refused to be influenced by his wife's disapproval of his warmth of manner.

Judith thanked him quietly and withdrew, not deigning to glance in the direction of the other two, who stood triumphant, and yet, perhaps, at heart abashed at the very completeness of their triumph.

As she entered her room Dandy sprang the whole length of his chain to meet her, and, stooping to caress him, Judith shed her first tears since Winifred's death—warm, passionate tears, that eased even while they wrung her heart.

Utterly friendless now and homeless, what remained to her in the future but despair to add to the bitterness of her defeat?

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN THE NIGHT.

All her boxes were packed, strapped, and corded, and a tilka gharrie was waiting outside to convey them away; but Judith still lingered at her door, watching an opportunity to steal away unnoticed.

She was ashamed that anyone should be witness to this ignominious departure—afraid that even the servants might guess of what she had been accused; loth, even, to meet those who were aware of the exact state of the case, since her pale face and reddened eyelids must betray how cruelly she had suffered

through their injustice, how fiercely she had resented it.

The consciousness of her own innocence could comfort her very little. It was too terrible to be even suspected of such duplicity, such lightness of conduct, and her cheeks burned every time she recalled Mr. Johnson's false words or Lady Sherstone's scathing rebuke.

For nearly an hour she had been standing so, with her hand upon the door, until all sound should be suspended, and she could pass through the corridor without fear of any such encounter as she dreaded.

But when at last she resolutely made an effort to overcome this moral cowardice, she found that, in spite of the delay, she had, after all, chosen the wrong time for her exit.

The Honourable Mrs. Hare, in garments handsomely attuned to woe, swept out of the drawing-room, and, surveying Judith with cool insolence from top to toe, deliberately cut her dead.

Following at a respectful distance came the Madrasse bearer; and, as though to atone for the alight to which she had been subjected, his salaam was lower and more reverential than ever; but a gleam of sympathy in his eye hurt Judith more than all. It seemed so humiliating to be pitied by a servant, and with such reason.

Having waited until Mrs. Hare's carriage had driven away, she hurried quickly on, only to find Mr. Johnson in the hall, standing on the threshold of the outer door.

With hat in hand, he stood aside to let her pass down the steps; but when she entered the ramshackle conveyance, he drew a little nearer.

"May I ask where you are going?" he said, humbly.

"I do not know. It does not matter. I suppose to some hotel," wearily.

"There are hotels and hotels. Some in this place are execrably bad. Take my advice, and go to Long's."

"I do not care where I go. Will you tell the man to drive on? It is getting late."

He rested both hands on the window-panel of the door, and looked earnestly in the girl's sad face.

"Forgive me if you can. I had to act in self-defence. I would have shielded you, had I been able, from that woman's venomous tongue, but —"

"Naturally, your first thought was for yourself," with irrepressible scorn.

"Naturally," he repeated gravely, "and you,—you had not treated me very well, remember."

The colour mounted to her cheeks as she met his significant glance. She bit her lips, and with an imperative gesture signalled the driver to go on. Mr. Johnson moved back a little, but followed the carriage with his gaze, a veiled threat as well as undisguised passion in his eyes. The game he believed to be in his own hands now, and he thought he could trust himself to lose nothing by the playing of the cards he held.

In the meantime, Judith leant back with eyes closed, until presently she was roused from a reverie, not too pleasant, by the coachman asking to which hotel he was to go.

The names of them were almost unknown to her, and involuntarily in reply she mentioned the one she had heard last—the one Johnson had recommended.

It was late when she arrived, and the gong sounded while she was changing her gown, so that when she reached the dining-room the inmates of the hotel were already seated round the table, but all looked up when she entered. Another lady who was present, and who was not slow in introducing herself to the new comer as Mrs. Scott-Courtney—a person of independent means, travelling round the world—was also sufficiently striking in appearance, though after a different fashion, being very big and florid looking, with massive features and snow-white hair drawn back from her face à la Marie Antoinette, while the small, rather shabby, red shawl she had thrown

across her shoulders was worn with a dignity that would have been ludicrous had it not been to some extent impressive, too.

She talked much and well, holding her small circle of listeners enthralled as she dilated on theosophy and supernatural subjects. She had come to India, she informed them, to "feel the pulse of the Hindoo," and hoped later to penetrate the interior of Thibet, and, perhaps, unearth the great Koothoomie himself.

There were two or three young men attached to a garrison class that was going on in the station; and an uninteresting young civilian, with a dowdy wife, who never took her eyes off Judith from the moment she came in, but drank in greedily every detail of her attire.

Judith herself, always inclined to be superstitious, was soon deeply interested in Mrs. Scott-Courtney's discourse, and when dinner was over, allowed herself to be persuaded to join the party in the drawing-room. Though fires had been for some time a tradition of the past they gathered round the empty grate, while Mrs. Scott-Courtney told them wonderful stories of her experiences at home and abroad. Story after story she told, each more uncanny, more soul-stirring, than the last, until to Judith, who sat opposite to her, and whose eyes were weary and dim with wakeful nights—it seemed as though she loomed larger and larger, assuming at last almost gigantic proportions as she raised herself a little on her chair and leant forward to emphasize her words.

She could not withdraw her fascinated gaze, until at last an anti-climax was reached, the narrator sinking in a moment from the sublime to the ridiculous, thus breaking the spell.

"I am a widow," she had begun, solemnly; "but before he died my husband and I were all in all to each other. We had no secrets, but conversed with soul laid bare to soul. Together we studied the mysteries of the spirit-world, and one day we made a solemn compact that whoever died first should visit the other and impart whatever knowledge he had gained."

"We were in Italy when he was seized with the malarious fever that killed him; and for three nights the clergyman who was there, and who shared my love for the mysterious and wonderful, sat with me until morning, our fingers resting on a small table that had been the medium of many manifestations before."

"For three nights we sat, but the electric current would not flow and I began to despair, believing that all the magnetic power we had hitherto exercised was dead with my beloved. It was daybreak after our third vigil, and I was alone and very weary, when at last my patience was rewarded."

She paused for breath; but satisfied that she carried her audience with her, went on at once.

"I had a slate and pencil in my hand, the slate resting on my knee, touching my gown (a soft black one that it was impossible could rustle), when presently I heard a faint scratching from underneath it. My spirits revived, my whole being was in a tumult; trembling with anticipation of I knew not what."

"Oh!" I cried, eagerly, "if that is you, for Heaven's sake, scratch again!"

The suppressed hysterical sounds that came from several directions at once she took to be sympathy with her emotion, and proceeded, excitedly,—

"My prayer was answered. The scratching was repeated with unmistakable precision; and, emboldened by this success, I asked if through the pencil I held I could receive a message from him direct, and was led to believe by continued violent scratchings that I could."

"I placed the pencil in contact with the slate and waited patiently for it to be guided—not in vain. After several ineffectual efforts I saw four words distinctly traced."

Every eye was fixed upon her in suspense, and some one was understood to ask for

further information, which, without hesitation, was granted.

"The four words were 'Send away that cook!' Then I knew that it was really my husband who had spoken to me then in spirit, though I might never see him bodily again. I understood why he descended to so commonplace a subject; it was a concession to my natural incredulity. He knew that if he spoke of our love or the sorrow of our separation I might well believe I had been carried away by my feelings, was, in fact, self-deluded; and then he was so careful for my creature comforts. That is why he warned me against that cook."

"And did you send that cook away?" asked the civilian's wife, awed, and a little breathless still.

The sea of visions shook her head.

"I wished afterwards I had. He turned out ever so badly, and really was never worth the wages I paid him."

Judith rose hurriedly to say good-night, conscious that if she stayed any longer she would be guilty of the *gaucherie* of laughter, or worse still—tears.

So much had happened to her lately, the tension of her nerves were overstrained and might give way at any moment; and the pathos of Mrs. Scott-Courtney's recital had threatened to prove the last straw, the final item, in a burden already too big for her to bear.

As she left the room, she saw passing along at the farthest end of the passage an ayah who seemed, even in the cursory glance she gave, to bear a strong resemblance to the woman who had waited on Winifred, and was still in the Commissioner's service.

She felt inclined to call to her, thinking she might have brought some message to herself; but on second thoughts it seemed so unlikely she could be there, that she refrained.

Her room was bare and uncomfortable, and it might have been the strangeness of her surroundings which prevented her from sleeping; but mentally Judith put it down to the stories she had heard that night, and resolved to abjure the black art for evermore.

Even when at last she sank into an exhausted sleep she woke at intervals, and had once or twice a creepy sensation as though someone were in the room with her—someone moving with stealthy footsteps and bated breath; but when she opened her eyes and looked about no one was there.

She did not know if she was awake or dreaming, when, soon after dawn, she saw the door of her room slowly open and the flutter of a white gown passing through.

Even had she been in possession of all her faculties she might have regarded it as an hallucination, the outcome of the feverish fancies which Mrs. Scott-Courtney's conversation had engendered.

But when she rose in the morning she understood it all, why she had been so restless and uneasy through the night, for from her dressing-table all her rings and watch had been taken, and on searching her boxes she found every article of value gone, not an anna left of her money, not a sign of the cheque Sir Julius had given her the day before.

The work had been done very completely, and must have stretched over several hours.

Even Judith, with her limited experience of oriental ways, could not doubt but that a native had been concerned, and her suspicions naturally pointed to the woman she had seen the night before on her way to her room.

So much seemed certain enough, but it remained to be discovered whether she had been led to commit the theft by the ordinary promptings of cupidity, or whether she had been instigated to the act by another. Was Johnson's hand apparent in this, too? Although it supposed him to be capable of the lowest form of meanness as well as vice, it seemed impossible to meet the question with an unhesitating denial.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DEFIANT STILL.

ALTHOUGH a report of the circumstances of the robbery was sent at once to the police, nothing transpired to elucidate the mystery, and Judith felt sorrowfully convinced that she would never see any of her treasures again, some relics of her dead mother, all presents and mementoes of the past.

Apart from this sentimental trouble, there was the more serious consideration that she was left penniless in a foreign country, unable to pay for the food she was eating now, and the roof above her head.

The landlady of the hotel was, however, a kindly-disposed woman, and promised to defer the settlement of her claims until Judith had obtained another situation, advising her to advertise for one at once.

This she did, and could only sit down and wait to see if she got any replies. Four or five days later she received one that seemed suitable, asking for a reference from the lady with whom she had lately been; and with some difficulty swallowing her pride, Judith sent the letter on to Lady Sherston, with a note, asking for a line from her in reply and recommendation.

An answer was promptly sent, and Judith's face burned with angry shame as she read the few curt lines it contained.

"Lady Sherston regrets that, knowing what she does of Miss Holt's character, she cannot conscientiously advise any lady to admit her to her home circle."

The note was torn into infinitesimal fragments, and strewn on the floor, but after all that ebullition afforded very little relief, and she was still standing in speechless wrath and dismay at the prospect in front of her, when a servant came to the door and announced a visitor.

The next moment Mr. Johnson stood before her, cool and well-dressed, with a disconcerting smile on his thin, sarcastic lips, that he made some pretence of trying to conceal.

But Judith was not deceived. She knew he was aware of her misfortunes, gloating over them, perhaps; and her small head was erect, her hands kept suggestively behind her back, as she said, quietly,—

"You force an honour upon me for which I was not prepared. I do not receive visitors while I am alone."

"But I hope you do not mean to treat me as a stranger? I came to offer help!"

"I require no help!"

He looked at her with gravest inquiry in his eyes.

"Are you sure," he began, doubtfully, "that you understand your own position? You are without money, and alone. Can you afford to refuse a friendly offer?"

"You seem very well acquainted with the state of my affairs!"

"Because I am, as ever, deeply interested in you, and in all that concerns you; moreover, nothing that you do can will be termed private, since at the present time, you are the most notorious person in Jaalpoore!"

"What do you mean?" scornfully.

"I mean a scandal once set afloat does not decrease as it goes on. The fact that you left Lady Sherston at a moment's notice spoke for itself—and her tongue has not been silent!"

Judith's face was set as though in marble; her lips scarcely moved as she asked in a low, strained voice,—

"What do they dare to say?"

"Things that would only anger you to hear. Take my word for it, there are not many who would care to come to you as I have come to-day, with the same purpose in their minds."

"What is it they have dared to say?" she repeated, never heeding what he was trying to imply.

He shrugged his shoulders in deprecation

of her request, and only spoke when, by continued silence, she insisted on a reply.

"Well, if you will have the truth, do not blame me, because it is unpalatable. They say that Lady Sherston was justified in resenting your designs upon me, and upon her husband. They know—because she told them—that you were discovered in my arms, while Winifred, my fiancée, lay dying; and they believe that Sir Julius's feelings towards you were not compatible with his loyalty to his wife."

"And you!" cried Judith, passionately, "Had you no word to say in my defence?"

He had the grace to wince at her words and look ashamed.

"A man's word, in these cases, goes for nothing. All I could say would only rebound to my own credit, not to yours. Besides, these are not the only charges against you!"

"What else is there?" she asked, more quietly.

"You have managed to make an enemy of Mrs. Hare, a rather formidable enemy, I fear. She has spread a report that you tried to entrap St. Quentin into an engagement, but that he backed out of it when he knew you for what you were."

Two vivid spots of colour glowed on Judith's otherwise white cheeks. She pressed both hands to her heart, and struggled to steady her voice, to say, with scarcely a tremor,—

"And you dare repeat these calumnies to me?"

"I dare do more. I ask you to let me share the shame of them. Be my wife, and we will defy the world together."

He advanced a little nearer. In his mind was the memory of the time when she had lured him on to serve her own ends, but the hot indignation he had felt was submerged now in rapture at the thought that he might, perchance, again clasp the lovely yielding figure in his arms, press unresisted kisses on her face, her lips; that she would belong to him, him only, however reluctantly she might submit to the circumstances of her fate.

That he would never win her heart he knew, but this in no wise tempered his satisfaction at the idea; he wanted to break her spirit, avenge himself for the scorn with which she had always met his advances; he wanted to possess the body and the soul of the most beautiful woman he had ever met.

Yet, in spite of this inward certainty that he must eventually succeed, he was discomposed by the cool, scrutinizing gaze with which she looked him over.

"I wondered at first," she condescended to explain, "if you were telling truth or only inventing those cruel slanders. Now I am inclined to believe you; since surely if I were not an outcast from society, not friendless, penniless, and unprotected, you"—such terrible emphasis of hatred and scorn was laid on the word, that even the pachydermatous covering in which, long ago, he had found it necessary to envelop himself was pierced, and he showed that it was so, by a quick indrawing of his breath, a rapid forward movement, a threatening glance—"you would never in sober earnest presume to propose that!"

"You take a very high hand with me!" angrily.

"Nothing else would suit my purpose. Winifred was gentle and submissive, and I daresay appealed to your generosity as well. I wish to show you that I can never be intimidated by any threats, never frightened nor driven into compliance. You may give up that idea at once."

She looked so well worth the winning, as she forbade him thus vehemently to hope, that no wonder her words had little or no effect; only made him more eager to attain the prize.

(To be continued.)

A good man and a wise man may at times be angry with the world, and at times grieved at it; but no man is ever discontented with the world if he does his duty in it.

THE POOR MAN'S SONG.

—o—

I LIVE in a garret, but what do I care?
I'm safer than some of my great neighbours
are;
The loss of my wealth I'm not troubled
about,
And my diet will certainly keep off the gout.
Then a truce to all grumbling, for happen
what may,
While I've health I'll be happy by night and
by day.

There's old Mr. Graball, whose's dwelling's
hard by,
At the loss of a pound is ready to cry;
And yet I'll be bound that the old fellow's
tin
Outnumbers, by far, the long amount of his
sin.
Then a truce to all grumbling, the morsel I
eat
Is honestly gotten, and wholesome, and sweet.

Then there's Mr. Freeliver, over the way,
Who groans with dyspepsia, day after day;
If Nature permitted, how quickly would he
Be willing to barter conditions with me?
Then a truce to all grumbling, for champagne
'tis clear,
Is not so conducive to health as small-beer.

Give me but the power to labour, and then
As happy I'll be as the richest of men;
And the evils committed in grasping for
gold
Can't trouble my conscience when I have
grown old.
Then a truce to all grumbling, for happen
what may,
While I've health I'll be happy by night and
by day.

F. S.

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

—o—

CHAPTER IX.

THE first breath of spring found Lord and Lady Castleton still wanderers from home. Rosamond took very kindly to life in the pleasant French capital; her taste for amusement and gaiety was gratified to the full; no fête or reunion was deemed complete without the beautiful Countess, and Rex woke suddenly to the fact that his wife was one of the most popular people in Paris.

He was proud of her, but at times a feeling came o'er him that this was not the life he had dreamed of, that Rosamond belonged more to the world than to him. They were rarely *tête à tête*; a quiet home evening seemed tedious to Lady Castleton. She pined for continual excitement, and her extravagance knew no bounds. Often and often Rex asked himself what would have become of them if the Lady Gerda had lived to enjoy her father's property.

"Rex, I want some money."
It was towards the end of February. They had been six weeks in Paris, and Rex had grown pretty used to this demand. To-day, however, it came on him with surprise; he had drawn the Countess a cheque for a hundred only the week before. He marvelled how she possibly could get through so much money, and for once he remonstrated.

"Rose, have you any idea how much you spend?"

Lady Castleton shrugged her shoulders—beautiful, shapely shoulders—to which the costume of black satin, worn from respect to the late Earl, was infinitely becoming.

"Don't be stingy, Rex."
"My darling, I am not; only, Rosamond, I believe you cannot know the amount you get through!"

"You've got plenty?"

"I am a rich man, granted; but do you know, little lady, in six weeks you have contrived to get through close upon a thousand pounds?"

"What's that?"

"Don't you understand, Rosamond, it is too much to spend in six weeks upon dress and trifles."

"You want me to look a fright!"

"You know you couldn't even if you tried."

She looked a little mollified.

"The money is yours, isn't it, Rex? If you never did a stroke of work all your days the money would come in just the same!"

"Just the same."

"Then we may as well enjoy ourselves."

Lord Castleton was standing by her side, an arm round her waist.

"Rosamond, don't you understand my anxiety to make a provision for the future?"

"No; I think it miserly!"

"If I died, Rose, I should like to leave you in comfort. We married hurriedly, there is no settlement, and I can leave you nothing but my savings."

Some young wives would have whispered they cared for no provision, life itself would be desolate without him; Rosamond did nothing of the kind.

"I daresay you'll outlive me!" she said carelessly.

"And then," continued Lord Castleton, "there is another contingency."

Rosamond opened her eyes.

"I wish you'd make haste, Rex, and say all you have to say. I hate being scolded!"

"I am not scolding you, darling! Another reason for being economical is that if we have children we must launch them in life. The entail on the Castleton property is very strict; the eldest son takes everything."

"We shall not have children, Rex."

The Earl smiled.

"It is to be hoped we shall, Rose; otherwise the title would be extinct."

"I hate children," said my lady bitterly.

"I think I would rather anything should happen than have any."

She had grown white to her very lips. Rex was about to make some hasty rejoinder, but he kept it back; Lady Castleton stooped over him and kissed him.

"I want no one but you, she whispered.

"You and I will go through the world together, Rex."

He looked into her eyes, and she conquered him, as she had over and over again just by means of her perfect beauty. He wrote the cheque, which my lady received with a smile; ten minutes later she got into a carriage to drive in the Bois; and Rex, left alone, began a letter to his lawyers.

He had brought, as he thought, ample money to Paris, but he began to be aware that his balance in the bank there was painfully short, and thought it as well to replenish his account. A large sum of ready-money had been found in the late Earl's desk, and Rex had deposited this at his own bank. It had been so ample an amount that he never listened to his lawyer's representations that probate of the late Earl's will must be obtained before more money could be appropriated. Rex had laughingly declared the funds in his own possession would last him for twelve months, and perhaps they might have done so had it not been for Rosamond.

He wrote a brief note, requesting the lawyers to forward him three thousand pounds; then he sent instructions to the caretaker of the town mansion to have all prepared for his reception in a month's time, for he meant to return to England immediately after Easter, which this year fell unusually early.

My lady was not long gone; they dined *tête à tête* that evening for a wonder; and then Rosamond went to dress for a grand ball.

Very beautiful she looked when she descended. She wore a perfectly plain black black velvet dress, out low in front, with some rare old lace shading her bosom; she had *gloire-de-Dijon* roses at the breast, and the

same flowers looped her train; her golden hair was coiled round her head and fastened with diamond stars, and her small shapely hands were encased in black kid gloves reaching to the elbow. Every inch a Countess looked Reginald's wife.

"Where are we going, Rose?"

"To Mrs. Marshall's. I expect we shall meet only English people; the French don't seem to care much about going out in Lent."

Every eye was fixed on Lady Castleton as she entered the ball-room, every voice proclaimed her the loveliest woman present; she was queen of that brilliant scene.

She enjoyed herself, there was no doubt of that. Watching her as she danced, Rex knew that to Rosamond the night was one of real pleasure, but he found little amusement in the scene. He was tired of gaiety; a quiet evening at home, with his wife reading aloud to him or listening to her sweet voice singing, would have been to him infinitely more happiness than making one of this brilliant throng.

A lady made her way up to him—a graceful Englishwoman, handsomely, but not extravagantly, dressed.

"Rex, have you quite forgotten me?" came in a well-remembered voice.

He started; it was his cousin, Amabel Tracy. They had played together as children, but of late years had been parted, Sir James Tracy's military duties detaining him in India.

"Is it possible, Amabel? I thought you were in India!"

She smiled.

"I was not very well, and James insisted on my coming over for three months. He wanted me to make it six, but of course I would not listen to him."

"Surely you are not here alone?"

"Oh, no! Mrs. Marshall is James's sister; she would make me stay a month out of the three. I tell her I am not an acquisition, for my thoughts are more in India than Paris."

She spoke as if this were only natural; her eyes beamed as she talked of her reunion with her husband.

Rex felt a little pang; after this manner Rosamond would certainly not have regretted him. She smiled and caressed him when he was pleased, but she would not have counted the day till she could leave the gayest European capital for a lonely hill station in India just for love of him.

"I want to be introduced to your wife," said Lady Tracy. "On all sides I hear of the beautiful Lady Castleton. I shall be proud to claim cousinship with her!"

"I shall be delighted to introduce you to Rosamond. I am very glad to have met you here!"

"I have seen two old friends here, but I have not yet had opportunity to renew my friendship with the other."

"Who is it?"

"Do you see that fair girl in black? Exquisitely beautiful, is she not?"

To Kate's mind this description applied only to Rosamond. In vain he followed the direction of his cousin's glance; he could see no beautiful girl in black save his own wife.

"She was our old Vicar's daughter," went on Lady Tracy, cheerfully. "Katy was eight years younger than I, and I used to make a pet of her. She was very pretty even then, but I had no idea she would ever be as beautiful as this!"

But for the Christian name Rex would have felt certain Cousin Amabel's old friend and his wife were one and the same. It came on him with a pang how little he knew of his Rosamond's past; until she came out at the New Theatre her history was a blank to him.

"She must have married well," said Lady Tracy. "People told me she had become Hal Bradley's wife, but I'm sure it could not be true. Hal's utmost efforts could not have supplied velvet and pearls like those!"

"Amabel, you must be dreaming," cried Rex, impetuously, her last words telling him she did, indeed, mean Rosamond. "You are speaking of my wife?"

Lady Tracy looked bewildered.

"I have not seen her since she was sixteen, but I don't think I can be mistaken. We were such friends, you see, Rex. Perhaps you met her and married her? Ah! that is it. I remember now, I have never heard your wife's name."

Rex was saved further reply, for they were close to Rosamond, and Lady Tracy stopped with outstretched hand.

"I am making your husband angry, Lady Castleton, by claiming you as an old friend!"

Rosamond was very pale, owing, no doubt, to the heat of the room and the fatigues of dancing. Her answer was quite ready; she looked at Lady Tracy with well-bred indifference.

"I think the Earl is right," she said, coldly. "I have a very good memory for faces, and I am certain we have never met before."

"It is a wonderful remembrance," said Lady Tracy, still incredulous. "Do you know the moment I saw your face I said to myself that is Kathleen? We were such friends," she added, half apologetically, "and I enjoyed the thought of seeing her so much."

Lady Castleton grew more gracious.

"I am very sorry I should be the means of disappointing you. Perhaps you may yet meet your friend."

"Oh no! She would not be likely to be here. She was the daughter of our old clergyman."

"Indeed! A 'goody' person, I suppose, given to tracts and district visiting?"

Amabel looked annoyed.

"She was only sixteen when I saw her last. I doubt not, though, that she is now practising those duties you mention. There was every chance of her becoming a clergyman's wife."

"Ah! —" my lady turned to her husband. "Rex, I am so tired. I wish you would see after the carriage."

He was off in a moment. Lady Tracy lingered to say a word of apology.

"It is of no consequence," returned Rosamond, haughtily. "I suppose people must be mistaken in saying I have an uncommon type of face since I am so strikingly like a village rustic."

She sweeps forward to meet her husband, and Lady Tracy was left alone. She sat motionless for a moment, wondering why she felt so hurt at a stranger's rudeness; then she saw something near her glittering on the ground.

Almost mechanically she picked it up. It was a broad, old-fashioned clasp, such as maidens used to wear in their hair, and which are now not despised by great ladies as the fastener of their flowers or wraps; but the trinket had no ordinary attraction for Amabel Tracy. It had once been her own. As a child, that gold band had confined her raven tresses. When she grew too old for her hair to float over her shoulders the clasp had been cast aside, until a little friend, long years her junior, had admired it so much as to induce the generous Amabel to offer it her.

"But it will not suit you, Katy; your hair is too fair to show the gold!"

"I will manage," said the pretty child, and the next time Amabel saw her she wore her hair tied with a broad, black velvet band, which in its turn was fastened by the quaint old clasp—and now the trinket was with its old owner, and it had dropped from the dress of the woman who had denied all acquaintance with her.

Amabel Tracy was the most unsuspecting of women, but she was no simpleton. The truth almost forced itself upon her—Kathleen and Lady Castleton were one and the same. The Countess wished the fact to be unknown.

"I don't like it," said Lady Tracy to herself. "Katy was a lady; her father was one of the truest gentlemen I ever met. Why should Reginald's wife be ashamed of her parentage?"

And then there flashed on her the memory of a face always near Katy's. In those old days no one ever doubted the village beauty

would be Mrs. Bradley. Had Katy jilted Hal, and was the reason she wanted to hide her identity?

"I don't like it!" murmured Amabel again. "There must be some reason for her deception. Poor child! Perhaps she jilted Hal to marry Rex, and is afraid of his finding her. I wish she would confide in me!"

She drove to the hotel in the morning, and asked for Lady Castleton.

She meant to ignore all the events of the evening before, and greet her as a cousin; but when the pretty drawing-room door opened it was not to admit the lovely form of Lady Castleton, but a smart waiting-maid, who said, "the Countess was asleep. She had come home tired from last night, and was too fatigued to see anyone."

And yet, as Amabel drove away, a white face peeped above the blind of an upper window, and two large, eager eyes watched the retreating fly.

"Saved once more!" came from Rosamond's blanched lips, and she sank back upon her pillows.

Lord Castleton was not a little annoyed when he returned to the hotel and heard of his wife's refusal to receive his cousin.

"I wish you had seen her!" he said, regretfully. "Amabel is one of the sweetest women I know!"

Rosamond pouted.

"Take care, or I shall be jealous!"

"Nonsense! We were children together. Do you know, Rosamond, she is almost my only living relative? I should have liked you to be friends."

My lady shrugged her shoulders.

"Lady Tracy certainly went a strange way to work to receive my friendship, protesting that I was some country girl, of whom I have never heard!"

"It was a mistake, dear."

"I don't like such mistakes!"

"By the way, Rose," said Rex, carelessly, "do you know, Amabel's mistake reminded me of a strange fact in our history?"

"What fact?" stily.

"That I do not know anything of your childhood or your friends. Rose," he went on, fondly, "if you have relations or friends whom you value, don't drop them for my sake. Believe me, I will be the first to honour those my wife loved!"

She had grown pale as death.

"I have no relations," she said, slowly.

"When I went on the stage I had no one belonging to me in the world!"

"And Lestrangle was your real name?"

"Certainly. I don't approve of being ashamed of your own name. If my name had been Jones or Robinson, perhaps theatrical prejudice would have compelled me to take a more romantic title, but Lestrangle did very well."

Rex stooped and kissed her.

"I think I am glad," he whispered. "I like to think my darling is all my own! that there is no one else in the world to share her love with me!"

"Not even an adorable cousin like Lady Tracy?"

He laughed.

"I believe you are jealous, Rose. But you need not be; Amabel returns to India in a few weeks."

An unmistakable look of relief crossed Lady Castleton's expressive face.

"We want no one but each other, Rex!" and that was the most lover-like speech she had ever made him.

Two days later they were again at home.

The Countess had complained of a headache, which made her break the engagement to dine with the Marshalls *en famille*.

The invitation had been given on purpose that Lady Tracy might meet her cousins, and Rosamond had promised Rex to be courteous to his favourite Amabel. She even declared she was glad of an opportunity of seeing them together, and went to dress in the highest

spirits; but, half-an-hour later, Pauline went to the Earl with the message,—

"My lady's head was so bad she could not go out. Would he take her excuses to the Marshalls?"

Rex repaired to his wife's dressing-room. Rosamond lay on the sofa, white as her muslin wrapper.

There was no doubt of her indisposition. The blue veins stood out on her forehead like cords; the hand she put into his was cold as death.

"Rosamond!" cried the Earl, almost beside himself, "what is the matter?"

She opened her beautiful eyes, and looked at him half-reproachfully.

"I have felt ill all day, Rex; but I knew you had set your mind upon going. Indeed, I would not give way if I could help it. You must make my excuses to Mrs. Marshall."

"As if I should go without you!"

"You must. Think of your cousin."

"I prefer to think of my wife! I will just send off a note of explanation, and come back to sit with you."

Rosamond shook her head.

"I shall be poor company, Reginald. I am too tired to talk. You had much better go to the Marshalls."

Reginald resolved to write his note, for the idea of leaving Rosamond in her present state never occurred to him.

He had just despatched a messenger with his excuses, when a card was brought to him inscribed,—

"Thomas Leslie."

He started. He was familiar with the name of the principal of the legal firm employed by his uncle; but he was certainly surprised to see the card, for Mr. Leslie was a very rich man, and had practically retired from the firm. In all the interviews Reginald had had with the lawyers he had never seen their chief, and, in fact, he had been told Mr. Leslie rarely went to the office, and was then in Nice, detained by the illness of a favourite daughter.

So, much perplexed at the arrival of his visitor, Lord Castleton directed him to be shown in, first ordering dinner for eight o'clock.

He saw a tall, handsome, middle-aged man, with a shrewd, clever face and manners, and bearing as stately as his own. Mr. Leslie was almost sixty, but he looked much less; his life had been one series of successes; now it was reported his income could be counted by its thousands.

Lord Castleton held out his hand.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Leslie!"

The lawyer returned the greeting warmly. "I only got back from Nice a fortnight ago! Would you believe it, Lord Castleton, I had never even heard of your uncle's death, and his daughter's loss. I have devoted all my time to looking well into your affairs, and when your letter reached us the day before yesterday I said to my partner, 'don't answer it. I'll run over to Paris and see the Earl.' You see there are some things much better arranged by word of mouth."

"Many things," agreed Rex. "You will stay and dine with me Mr. Leslie, and we can discuss business comfortably afterwards."

The lawyer smiled.

"But the Countess? Ladies don't generally care for dry, business talks."

"Lady Castleton is keeping her own room from indisposition. You see me a bachelor for the evening, Mr. Leslie."

Dinner was served; the lawyer showed himself a man of general conversation. He had travelled much and talked well. Rex thought he had rarely met a pleasanter companion. But when the cloth was removed and the wine on the table, when the waiter retired and left the two men sitting over the fire, there came an uncomfortable pause. Rex began to wonder what could have brought Mr. Leslie across the channel. The lawyer, for perhaps the first time in his life, felt a

difficultly in telling the tidings he knew he must communicate.

"You were not on intimate terms with your uncle?" he said at last, slowly.

"No one was! That strange man, Mr. Ashwin, knew more of him than anyone, I suppose!"

"The news of his marriage and his daughter's existence must have been a heavy blow to you!"

"Frankly, it was. I had just married a beautiful, portionless bride, and the thought I had nothing to share with her but an empty title was terrible. The whole affair was distressing! I felt almost like a scoundrel when that poor girl took her life, and yet I could not help realizing what a deliverance from poverty it meant to me!"

Mr. Leslie looked strangely grave.

"Lord Castleton," he said sadly, "you are young, and just setting out in life. I am well-nigh three-score years old, and I have served your family since before you were born! Will you believe I have come to Paris in all kindly feeling toward yourself; though I know the news I have to bring must be a blow to you?"

"I don't understand!" said Rex, slowly. "There can be no difficulty in proving my uncle's will. Lady Gerda is dead, and I am the only other person named in it as his heir!"

"Your uncle's will can be proved, but—"

"I know I wrote for a lot of money the other day, one runs through so much in Paris; but then I have at present only my wife to think of, and our income is a large one!"

"Lord Castleton, I see you have no suspicion of my meaning. I must speak more plainly. You have no proof that would stand as evidence in a court of law that your cousin is dead!"

"Nonsense!" said Reginald, sharply. "Why, I was there myself at the time she disappeared! I saw her hat at the water's edge! I read her farewell letter!"

"My lord, I am grieved to be the person to undeceive you. I have taken the opinion of two or three counsel. They are unanimous in their answer! To their mind there is not a tittle of proof that Lady Gerda is not alive!"

Poor Reginald! He could not bear himself for feeling sorry there might be a chance of his cousin's safety, and yet he trembled when he thought of Rosamond.

"Tell me everything!"

"The case can be brought before the Court of Probate or Chancery; but their decision is certain. The estate will be placed in the hands of an administrator for a period of three, five or seven years."

"And then?"

"If no news is heard of the Lady Gerda you will be able to take possession; but at best it will be an uncertain tenure. If, fifty years hence, Lady Gerda was found, and could prove her identity, she would be able to turn you and your heirs out of Castle-ton."

"It's absurd!" cried Rex, hotly. "What in the world makes people believe the girl is alive?"

"The counsel I have employed use three arguments in favour of their theory—the absence of all motive for suicide, the non-recovery of the body, and the statement of those who knew the lost girl intimately that she was of a bright and happy temperament, and had been brought up carefully and religiously. The woman in whose house the Countess died, and who had known Lady Gerda from childhood, declared she would as soon believe her own daughter capable of suicide as your cousin."

Reginald paced up and down the room with long, hurried strides.

"Why did she disappear?"

Mr. Leslie answered nothing; he was gazing into the fire.

"Why did she disappear?" asked Rex again. "The heiress of fifty thousand

a-year surely had no motive for leaving her friends?"

"She may have been decoyed away."

"In broad daylight? In an obscure Yorkshire village? Impossible!"

"There is another reason. It is most likely her father confided in her the contents of his will, and that she knew a marriage with yourself was the condition of her inheriting her fortune. She may have been averse to this; she may have had a lover, and for his sake left Castle-ton, that she might not be the one to incur poverty by refusing you."

Reginald looked into the fire.

"What is to be done?"

"I cannot tell you. Only for the present you cannot touch a penny of the Castle-ton revenues. They are as much taken from you as if your cousin were reigning at the Castle."

"Fifty thousand a-year!" cried the Earl, harshly. "Fifty thousand a-year without an owner!"

"It may be yours," said the lawyer. "I think it very likely the Court may make three years the time for which to await the discovery of Lady Gerda."

"Three years!" groaned Rex; "but I have not a halfpenny! I have spent money like water, believing the Castle-ton revenues were mine! I ought to have been warned!"

"The very thing I told my partners. They said the very fact of your being content to go abroad while the case was unsettled showed how little hope you had of its being decided in your favour."

"I looked on it as settled already."

"What is to be done?"

"It means ruin!"

"Nonsense! I beg your pardon, my lord, but things are not so bad as that. You must live economically, somewhere on the continent. You can't be quite without resources?"

"I always depended on my allowance from my uncle. I have but six hundred a-year, all told."

The lawyer's brow cleared.

"Six hundred a-year! Why, that's famous. You and the Countess will be able to get on very comfortably abroad; and in three years' time you may be able to take your places in your own county."

Rex shook his head.

"And if not?"

"Then you must try and get some diplomatic post. Come, my lord! things are not so very bad! You are young and strong; you have a beautiful wife, and—"

Rex saw his mistake. He, the lawyer, hearing the Earl had married a portionless girl, thought of the bride as a domesticated, simple creature, who cared for nothing so that she had her husband.

"That is the worst part," said the Earl. "How will my wife bear the change?"

"It is worse for you."

"Hardly. Lady Castleton is very beautiful, and intensely admired. I think gaiety and amusement are as necessary to her as the air she breathes. I am certain poverty will kill her."

"But she was not rich before her marriage!"

"She was on the stage. You have probably heard of the actress, Miss Lestranger?"

"Heard of her and seen her too. She was the loveliest woman in London!"

"And the one most unfitted for poverty."

"You would not like her to return to her profession, I suppose, Lord Castleton?"

Rex flushed with anger.

"I would rather die!"

"I meant no offence."

"And I take none. Only having married her it is my bounden duty to provide for her."

"She will help you to bear the reverse of fortune," said the elder man, kindly. "A good wife softens even poverty, Lord Castleton."

Rex would have assaulted anyone who had

dared to suggest his Rosamond was not a good wife, but yet he felt certain she would aggravate rather than soften the difficulties of his position.

"Of course you will tell her?"

"I must," groaned Reginald. "Of course things will have to be changed at once. I shall probably leave Paris to-morrow."

"Ay! Go to Germany and travel incognito; you'll find money last a long time that way."

"Not with Rosamond," thought the young husband to himself.

"And your friends are sure to be able to find you something in the diplomatic line."

"I hope so."

"I am glad I have broken the matter to you. It has weighed upon my mind."

"There is one other matter," said Rex, nervously, "the money I wrote for. Of course I can't have it from the Castle-ton revenues, but money I must have. I doubt if I can even leave Paris without it."

Mr. Leslie looked grave.

"Do you want a large sum?"

"I must have a thousand. That will clear up all here and settle us in some quiet place, and then we must live on my income for the present."

"But that will be terribly reduced by raising the thousand."

"Ay, but that can't be helped. I only wish the money could be raised now. I fear I shall have to wait some days for it, and every day will add to our expenses."

"Of course you will allow me to be your banker. I have a thousand pounds in notes in my pocket-book. Nonsense! don't talk of obligations, Lord Castleton. Of course, you would have employed us to realise the sum from your property. It will merely be keeping the amount, when raised, instead of sending it out to you."

A waiter here brought in a letter, and at Mr. Leslie's request, Lord Castleton opened it. It proved to be from Lady Tracy.

"Congratulate me dear Reginald," wrote the happy matron. "A telegram has just come, telling me not to sail for India, as James is on his way home. It was sent from Marseilles, so he will be here this week. He has some delightful post in Europe, so we shall not be banished to the Far East any more. We were all so sorry not to see you and Lady Castleton to-night; my sister says we must fix some other evening when James has come—Ever yours sincerely, ANABEL TRACY."

"The very thing," breathed Rex, speaking his thoughts aloud. "Sir James is sure to want attaches and that sort of thing. For his wife's sake he'll find me a berth at his embassy, wherever it is."

"Sir James Tracy!" said Mr. Leslie, who dabbled in politics. "He's to be Ambassador to the Court of Gröningen. It would be a first-rate thing for you."

The Court of Gröningen sounded a very dull residence after the Champs Elysées in Paris, but Rex was too thankful to see a chance of occupation. He looked positively radiant.

"And now I will not keep you any longer. I am sure you must stand in need of rest, Lord Castleton. I need not tell you that we shall ever be as proud to serve you as though you were reigning a powerful nobleman in Yorkshire."

Rex wrung his hand, waited until the door had closed on him, and then went in search of the creature who was at once the darling of his heart and the cause for which he most regretted poverty.

She was better now, Pauline informed the Earl, and had just ordered coffee to be taken to her drawing-room.

He found his wife sitting in a low chair, her golden hair falling over her shoulders, her graceful form wrapped in a dressing gown of pale blue cashmere, embroidered in white silk, and trimmed with costly lace; her little feet were encased in blue satin slippers; an eider-down quilt rested upon her knees. She was very



[“BETTER, MY DARLING?” THE EARL SAID, TENDERLY.]

pale still, but to Reginald's mind lovelier than ever. Her face softened as he kissed her.

“Better, my darling?”

“Oh! yes, Rex. Sit down; I want to talk to you.”

He drew up a chair and sat down. One hand toyed with her golden hair, the other clasped hers. Lord Castleton was a lover still in act and word.

“What have you been doing?”

“Entertaining my lawyer. He came to Paris to see me on business.”

“I hate business.”

Rex half sighed.

“I hope you will not often be troubled with it, my darling.”

“Why didn't you go to the Marshalls?”

“I will go when you are well again. After all, there is no hurry. Amabel Tracy is not going to India.”

Rosamond's eyes flashed.

“Not going to India! Oh! Rex, why does she stay here? Is it to come between us, and make me wretched!”

“You absurd child!” and the Earl drew the golden head down to rest on his shoulder. “Don't you know there is no one can come between us? Amabel stays for a good reason; she is expecting her husband.”

Lady Castleton smiled.

“Then I don't mind.”

“And now what is the mighty subject on which your ladyship wishes to discourse?”

“I want to leave Paris.”

He wished it, too, but he knew how different would be their next surroundings to these. Rose had pictured the family mansion in London, presentations, balls, flower-shows, operas. The reality must be a modest flat in an obscure German town, with the condescending notice of German royalties for society.

“You cannot wish it more than I do, Rose?”

She clapped her hands.

“Let us start to-morrow!”

“With all my heart.”

“I thought you wanted to stay here?”

“Mr. Leslie has brought news which makes it most desirable we should leave Paris.”

“What news?”

“Can you bear it, Rose?”

“Yes.”

He told her then, told her as tenderly as it was possible, whispering fondly he would never let poverty touch her, that while he lived to shield her from them she should never feel the thorns of adversity.

But her reception of the news bewildered him. Instead of being cast down she smiled into his face with her dark, lovely eyes.

“Is that all, you foolish Rex! Why, you made me think something terrible had happened?”

“Don't you call this terrible?”

“No.”

“Rosamond!”

“I see no particular worry,” observed my lady calmly. “It all hinges on whether the girl's alive. Of course she isn't; no girl would take the trouble to make people believe she had committed suicide unless she really meant to do so!”

“But don't you see, sweetheart, we can't prove this, and the law won't accept presumptive evidence as proof. For three years we shall have to live independently of Castleton.”

“I'm sure I don't want to go there, gloomy old place. I should always think Gerda's ghost haunted it!”

“But the money, Rosamond!” suggested Rex. “You know, we can't live on air.”

“You must go to the Jews.”

“The Jews!”

“Don't look so horrified. I wonder you never thought of it. It is the only thing to do.”

“I meant to take a diplomatic appointment, and economise on our income.”

Rosamond shook her head.

“That would never do!”

“My dear, I fear it must do!”

“I won't let you!” said Rosamond. “You're sure to have to pay pretty heavily for the accommodation; but you'll find some Jews willing to manage it. They must allow us the ten thousand a-year for the next three years. Then, when you come into your inheritance, you can pay them fifty thousand out of the back-rents. It will be an awful squeeze to manage on ten thousand, but I daresay we shall manage it somehow.”

“It would be dishonourable!” he said, huskily. “Don't you see, Rose, I might never come into Castleton at all, then the money-lenders would lose both interest and principal!”

“They must take the risk of that,” said his wife, coolly. “That's why they exact such fearful interest to cover their losses.”

“I never borrowed a five-pound note in my life!”

“Good boy! But that's no reason you never should!”

“I don't like it!”

“And I don't like Grünigen. Rex, I won't go there; it would kill me!”

Long into the morning did the husband and wife talk of their future, and in the end Rosamond triumphed.

Rex, who had held such lofty ideas of honour, bowed to his wife's will. Like many another man, brave and honest as himself, he sacrificed his conscience to his love.

The next day, instead of seeking an interview with Sir James Tracy, he might have been seen wending his way through one of the most densely-populated quarters of Paris, to the house of a usurer, to whose influence ten per cent. of the ruined lives and blighted homes of the gay French capital might have been traced.

Heaven save our hero! He was on the downward path, and it was his wife's hand that sent him!

(To be continued.)



["WILL YOU BE GOOD ENOUGH," THE BARONET CRIED, BITTERLY, "TO PROVE YOUR MARRIAGE?"]

NOVELETTE.]

EUSTACE STAPLEHURST'S REVENGE.

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CHAPTER I.

LOST IN THE WOOD.

ELSIE GRANGER was the only daughter of a wealthy country squire, and she had been brought up by her loving parents with the greatest care. Till the age of sixteen she had never been outside the boundaries of her father's beautiful estate alone. Nor had she desired to do so, for her brother Frank had always been her constant companion; and when studies were over they had been accustomed to ramble about together to their heart's content, or ride their ponies side by side about the lovely parkland belonging to Featherstone Manor.

But time does not stand still, and when Frank had passed his eighteenth birthday he had to say good-bye to his little playmate and begin his college life; and Elsie, standing all alone within the large iron gates, waving her last farewell to the brother she so greatly loved, felt very sad indeed. She wandered aimlessly about day by day, failing to be amused or interested in anything around her. Then her mother's father was taken very seriously ill, and she and Mr. Granger set off at once for Scotland, to a pretty estate in Aberdeen, leaving Elsie in the charge of her faithful old nurse, who had waited on her since her earliest babyhood, and had been in Mrs. Granger's family before she was married.

Elsie and Nurse Ann were the best of friends; and a few days after the departure of her parents, Elsie asked her to accompany her to the cottage of a poor woman, who Mrs. Granger took a great interest in, and whom

Elsie had promised to visit during her absence. The old servant readily consented, and the two were soon walking along the wooded path through the pretty forest that divided the little village of Featherstone, from that of Forest Dean.

It was a cold, dull-looking afternoon late in November, and when they arrived at Mrs. Fraser's miserable little home, although it was only three o'clock, it was becoming dark; so they decided they would only leave their basket of delicacies with the poor sufferer, and return earlier the following day to sit with her awhile. But on entering the cottage they found her in so sad a state, from illness and neglect, that they felt they could not leave until they had made her more comfortable. When they at last said good-bye to her they found a strong north wind was blowing, and it was snowing fast. They hastened their steps towards Featherstone Manor, but a great deal of snow had fallen in a short time, and they found great difficulty in keeping the narrow path across the forest, and at last lost it altogether, and little by little drifted towards the centre of it. Then they came to a standstill, and found they could go no further, for they felt in front of them a high mud wall covered with brambles.

Elsie's heart sank as she ran against it, and tears filled her eyes, but she cheered her old companion all she could, by assuring her she could hear the sound of a dog barking at no great distance off, and told her to listen to it.

"No, I cannot hear it, my dear," she returned in a broken voice; "and oh! Miss Elsie, if anything should happen to you, what would your parents say?" and she began to really sob with grief.

"Don't cry, there's a dear old woman. I've no doubt we shall be all right. This wall must have been made as the beginning or end of some part of the Forest, and it may lead

us to some exit that we have never heard of. Let us walk steadily along and see where it takes us to." Once more they proceeded, and went on and on, but very slowly, for there was no path or beaten track, and the way was almost impassable. As the darkness became denser and more dense, they grew faint and weary, and sat down on a stump of a tree to rest.

"Miss Elsie, you must not stay here," said Nurse Ann at length. "Do try and rouse yourself; for in this bitter cold, sleep would mean death to you!" and she shook her gently, but Elsie had fainted from exhaustion, and could not answer.

In vain the faithful old servant rubbed the senseless form; she could get no response from the firmly-closed lips—and despair filled her mind. But she determined to save her young mistress if she could, and taking off all her warm wraps, she placed the things round her, keeping on nothing over her dress to protect her from the inclement weather. Then she listened again, and this time she was sure she heard a man's voice singing in the far distance. She called at the top of her voice again and again, but with no success, save one thing—the sound seemed to draw nearer to her, and falling on her knees she prayed that Elsie's life might be saved, and that she might be restored to her parents in safety. She arose with a lighter heart, and called again with fresh vigour.

"Help! help!" she cried, till she, too, was exhausted, and at last another cry was heard mingling with hers and the whistling of the wind. Nearer and nearer it came, till at last it was quite close.

"Where are you?" inquired a manly voice; but there was no reply to his repeated inquiry, for Nurse Ann had lived just long enough to gain the much-needed help, and had at the last minute succumbed to her long-known complaint of heart disease; brought to a crisis suddenly by the intense cold and anxiety.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT FORTY YEARS PREVIOUS TO THE EVENTS
OF THE LAST CHAPTER.

HERBERT STAPLEHURST was the second son of a rich and proud baronet, and he very much offended his father by falling in love with his little sister's governess—a pretty gentle girl of twenty, named Alice Fairley. Sir Marmaduke, as soon as he discovered their mutual affection for each other, had insisted on the girl leaving his house without more than a day's notice.

But Alice did not go out into the world alone, for Herbert persuaded his sister Grace to take a letter from him to Alice, asking her to pack her things at once and send them to the station over night, and to be ready on the following morning at five o'clock, and start with him by the first train for the metropolis, where he promised her they should be married by special license. He kept his word; and before eleven o'clock that day they were man and wife, and he was ready to protect her from all care and sorrow, as far as it lay in his power.

He wrote to his father as soon as he had taken his bride to the "Star and Garter," well-known as the best hotel at Richmond, where they had made up their minds to spend their honeymoon, and in return he received a letter containing a cheque for one thousand pounds, and saying as he had chosen to marry against his consent, that would be the last he should ever do for him. He ended his epistle by requesting that he would never try to see him again, as his doors would be closed against him.

And Herbert, though saddened by his father's unkindness, could not feel altogether unhappy, for he loved his young wife with his whole heart, and felt glad that he should be able to support her, working to supply all her needs. She had placed her arms around his neck, and had promised ever to try and make him happy, and thus repay him for giving up so much for her sake.

Then he began life in earnest. They left the "Star and Garter," and found two clean little rooms in one of the side streets of Richmond; and as soon as they were settled down he went up to London and invested his money, and called upon his father at his large private bank and asked him for employment.

After some hesitation he promised him a clerkship if he was found capable of attending to his duties; and a few weeks later he began his work, with small pay truly, but it was sufficient with what Sir Marmaduke had sent him to keep a tiny home for himself and his wife. He felt thankful that they could leave their lodgings, and really have a small cottage of their own.

And very bright the little place looked, all covered with roses and clematis; and by laying out the money that Herbert Staplehurst had by him when he left "St. Albans," the residence of his father, he furnished their little home prettily and comfortably, and although they could afford no luxuries, they were truly happy in each other's love.

A year after their marriage a little girl was born to them, making them, if possible, happier than before. All went on peacefully for eighteen years, and Rose Staplehurst was fast approaching womanhood. Very beautiful she was with her bright blue eyes and golden hair, and pencilled black eyebrows, and a delicate pink and white complexion, an intellectual forehead, and straight, small nose, with a kiss-provoking little mouth, and strong, even teeth. Everyone who saw her admired the winsome girl, but only one of her father's friends did she really take any interest in, and that was one of the junior clerks at the bank, a fine, handsome young fellow named Alexander Cunliffe, and to him Rose gave all the love of her heart. Although they were not actually engaged, they had an understanding between them that as soon as Alec was better off he would ask Mr. Staplehurst's

consent to their union; and as they were both young, Alec being only nineteen, they could well afford to wait.

Things had certainly prospered with Herbert Staplehurst since his marriage; for Mr. Stanley, the manager of the bank, had been a good friend to him, and had persuaded the Baronet to give him rises in his income and position whenever he could find any plausible excuse for doing so; he had also done his best to reinstate him in Sir Marmaduke's favour, but without much success, for besides an occasional conversation upon business matters, he had declined any intercourse with his son.

But Herbert was not lacking in friends, for he was greatly liked by all his comrades at the bank, both above and below him, and he and Alice were always welcome guests at their various homes, and their lives passed pleasantly.

Now that Rose was grown up they were glad to enter into what gaiety they could afford for her sake, thinking it good for her to see as many people as possible before settling down for life, which they felt sure she would wish to do before she became many years older.

But little as Herbert and Alice Staplehurst anticipated it, they were not to be allowed the blessing of watching over their lovely rosebud, for they were both taken seriously ill with diphtheria and died in a few days, leaving Rose alone in the world.

The girl was away when her parents were taken ill, staying with Mr. Stanley and his dear old wife; and regardless of Rose's entreaties to be allowed to return home to wait on them, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley would not let her go.

But Mr. Stanley went himself and provided suitable and trained nurses for their comfort, and went daily to see how they were getting on.

When he found how seriously ill they were becoming, he telegraphed for Sir Marmaduke Staplehurst to come without delay, for the Baronet was travelling abroad at the time, and before he received the news they had both passed away.

When he at last returned to England, which he did as soon as possible, all that was to be seen of the son he had so repeatedly refused to forgive, and his gentle wife, were two green mounds in the little churchyard of the village where they had lived. Then, when too late, he regretted his harsh treatment of him, and begged Mr. Stanley to take him to see his only granddaughter, Rose.

He resolved to take her back with him to Silverlands, and give her a place in his heart and home. It was soon settled that Rose should remain one month with her friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, and that, after that, she should be escorted by Mr. Stanley to her new home.

The month that passed after the arrangements were finally settled was a terribly sad one to the poor, sorrow-stricken girl. Again and again she visited her parents' grave, and wildly blamed herself for not having insisted upon nursing them during their last illness.

But she never said a word of what she felt on the subject to her kind old friends, feeling sure they had acted for the best in their decision; and seeing how good they were to her she clung to them in her trouble as a frightened child might have done, for as each day went by she felt more and more miserable, and she had a still greater dread of the life before her.

Rose had certainly not taken a fancy to her grandfather. She instinctively shrank from him. She knew that he had refused to see her during her parent's lifetime, and resented the fact; and although he was undoubtedly handsome, with well-out, regular features, he had a hard, firm mouth, and a cold, cynical expression of face. She dreaded living with him more than she could express in words; but she felt he had offered her a home out of kindness, and she determined to try and please him in return.

Although she knew her father had left her forty pounds a year, she had begged to be allowed to board with, and give her services to, some quiet family in the neighbourhood in which she had lived. But seeing how much the suggestion displeased the Baronet, she had dropped the subject; and saw that she ought to be grateful for the home of comfort offered to her, although she could not hide from herself how utterly desolate she would be among strangers. When it came to a few days before she had to say good-bye to Alec Cunliffe she cried as if her heart would break.

"Rose, my darling!" he said tenderly, "wait for me a few short years, and all will be well with us. If I only had a mother to take you to I would ask you to marry me at once. As it is, I intend to leave my present apartments and live in a small room, so as to save enough quickly for my sweet wife to come to me. Rose, my own precious love, I simply worship you, and if you will only be true to me we must be happy in the end," and he took her tenderly in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers. "Rose, my heart's darling, you will wait for me, won't you?"

"Alec," she returned earnestly, "nothing shall ever part me from you, and as soon as you are ready for me I will come to you, with or without my grandfather's permission."

"My brave darling!" he returned; "but, oh! love, I feel as if it is madness to allow you to go down to Silverlands. I have been told how Sir Marmaduke treated your father, and is it likely that he will treat you any better? Nay, but perhaps far worse, for if ever you want to defy his authority he would keep a close guard over you, and then, perhaps, you could not escape. I have just thought of a plan, sweetheart. Will you agree to it, my precious Rose?"

"Alec, I will agree to anything you wish," she answered gently. "Tell me what you want me to do."

"Rose, my darling!" he replied, passionately. "I cannot offer you a home yet, but if you would become my wife before you go down to Silverlands, I think we should both be happier; and then, when I have a suitable place ready for you, I could claim you—claim you by right, my sweet one, and hold you against all the world. Rose, my precious Rose, will you consent to my plan?"

Rose trembled in every limb, and clung to her lover convulsively.

"It is too soon after my parents' death, dear Alec," she returned, sorrowfully; "and if it were not so it is too late now, for I am going away in a few days, and there would not be time."

"Darling, your parents always liked me, and I feel sure they would rather you had some one to protect you. Let me speak to our good friend Mr. Stanley about it this evening, and if he agrees with me that it is best for you, will you consent then, my precious one?"

"Yes, if Mr. Stanley thinks it is right, I will," returned Rose, with downcast eyes. "But oh, Alec! for my parents' sake, I would rather wait until a year at least had passed away."

"Would you not like to feel that you really belonged to me, dear one?" he asked, tenderly, and for answer she nestled to him still closer, and they relapsed into silence too sweet to be broken by words. An hour later Alec Cunliffe had a long and earnest talk with Mr. Stanley, the result being that the old man promised to see Sir Marmaduke Staplehurst, and ask him if he could wait for Rose another month or five weeks, as she was not quite ready to come to him. When he did so, the Baronet replied that he would be pleased for Mr. Stanley to keep her as long as he wished; and having gained his point so far, Mr. Stanley wrote to an old cousin of his, who was a clergyman in a little remote village in the north of England, called Heather Leigh, and asked him to have his wife to stay with him for a month, and also to allow her to bring Rose and Alec with her, offering, as he was a comparatively poor man,

to pay handsomely for their board while they were there; and as Mr. Frier wrote to say he should be delighted to have them, Mr. Stanley obtained a month's leave for Alec from the bank, on the plea of his being in ill-health; and the trio travelled down to Heather Leigh without delay. As soon as they arrived they took the old man into their confidence, and he promising to help them all he could, put up their banns on the following Sunday.

At the end of three weeks they were married in the tiny village church; and Mr. Stanley having asked for two days' holiday, went to Heather Leigh, and gave Rose away.

After the wedding they all returned to London, and arrived home in the evening, when it was far too dark for anyone to see them. One week later Rose was forced to bid good-bye to the husband she so dearly loved, and to Mrs. Stanley, and she took her journey down to Silverlands, accompanied by her true friend, Richard Stanley.

CHAPTER III.

ROSE'S NEW HOME.

WHEN Rose arrived at St. Albans, the residence of her grandfather, she felt a sense of deep depression come over her, and she clasped the banker's hand tightly, when the majestic butler had closed the drawing-room door and left them alone together.

"Oh! how dark and dismal everything seems," said Rose; "and to think I have to live here for months, perhaps years!"

"St. Albans is a beautiful place, my dear," returned Mr. Stanley kindly, "and you must try and brighten it, and make it look more home-like; the furniture could not be handsome, and if it were not all arranged so stiffly, and a few flowers were put in the empty vases, it would seem a different room. You must remember since Grace married and went away, there has never been a lady in the house to adorn it in any way; so now you are here I shall expect to see everything look bright again."

"How can I make anything bright when I feel so unhappy?" replied Rose, with tears coming to her eyes; "you don't realise how intensely I feel my parents' death. I think sometimes I shall never be happy any more; I miss them so greatly."

"Poor girl," said Mr. Stanley, gently. "I do indeed sympathise with you, and I know you will never forget them; but you have your husband to live for now, and for his sake you must make the best of your life; for remember how much he loves you."

"I do indeed remember it, dear old friend," returned Rose, smiling through her tears, and I am so grateful to you for helping us in the way you have, and I shall never forget your kindness, believe me."

"I am only too pleased to have helped you, child," said the banker, warmly; "it is the best thing for you, I am sure, to feel you have someone to love, and protect you in the future; but I shall get in a nice row if Sir Marmaduke ever finds it out, though I don't mind that, as long as you are both happy. But we must not talk any more treason, for I hear the old chap coming," and a minute later the door opened, and the Baronet entered the room.

"Well, Rose," he said, a little stiffly, "so you have come at last. You were evidently not in a hurry to avail yourself of my invitation!"

"I thought you said it did not make any difference to you when I came?" she replied, colouring, while she lightly kissed the cheek Sir Marmaduke had presented to her by way of welcome.

"Oh, it did not make the slightest difference to me," returned the Baronet, coldly, and he passed on to shake hands with Mr. Stanley.

"It is good of you to have kept the child so long," he said, "and I am much obliged to you for bringing her down. My son and grandson

do not come home till to-morrow, so I had no time to attend to her."

"I am only too pleased to have escorted Rose," replied Mr. Stanley, heartily, "although my wife and I are very sorry to part with her, for we shall miss her sadly. I hope you will let her come and stay with us sometimes?"

"Oh, certainly," said Sir Marmaduke, coldly, "although for the present Rose must be content to remain quietly at home. I do not approve of too much change for young people; it only unsettles them, and makes them restless."

"Would you like to go to your room, my dear?" he continued, turning to Rose, "if so I will ring the bell for your maid."

"Thank you," said Rose, quietly. "I should be glad to take my things off, as I am tired after my journey; but I really do not require a maid to help me; I am accustomed to doing everything for myself."

"No doubt," answered Sir Marmaduke, cynically, "but you will not be allowed to do so here," and as soon as the servant appeared Rose followed her from the apartment, and when she reached her own room she sank into an easy chair, and began to weep bitterly.

"Are you unwell, miss?" asked the girl, kindly; "if so, can I do anything for you?"

"There is nothing you can do, thank you," returned Rose, sadly. "I shall be better to-morrow—to-day I am a little upset at leaving home, and I shall be glad when I can go to bed, as my head aches. Do you think I shall be allowed to come upstairs early?"

"Oh! yes, miss, if you say you are not well. Sir Marmaduke generally retires to his study about nine o'clock, and we do not often see him after that."

"Have you been here long?" asked Rose, for the sake of something to say.

"Yes, for some years. I used to be Miss Grace's maid, and when she married I became parlour maid. When it was settled you were coming, Sir Marmaduke asked me if I would like to wait on you, or go on with my house work. I said I would rather be lady's-maid again, so I hope I shall be able to please you Miss Rose, and if there is anything I can do to make you feel better, you must tell me."

"You are very kind," replied Rose, smiling up at her; "and now you must let me know your name, as I have not heard it yet."

"My name is Fanny Somers, miss," returned the girl, "and, like yourself, I have no parents, and that is the reason I wanted to come and wait on you, because I thought if you felt as sad as I do sometimes I might try and comfort you; at least, that is, if you would not think it a liberty."

"Indeed, no!" said Rose, earnestly. "I am truly grateful to you for your good thought of me, and similar trouble will make us take an interest in each other. Is it long since your parents died, Fanny?"

"My father has been dead some years," replied the girl, sadly; "but my mother only six months."

"Then I can sincerely feel for you," said Rose, gently, "for I know how unhappy you must be. And now, Fanny, I must go down, or Sir Marmaduke will be vexed with me."

Taking some lace work she had brought with her she descended the stairs, and entered the drawing-room, where she found the Baronet and Mr. Stanley having a somewhat excitable conversation on politics; so sitting down by the lately lighted lamp she began her work, and sat silent until the bell rang for them to dress for dinner.

"I will excuse you dressing to night, Rose," said Sir Marmaduke, coldly, "as I told Mr. Stanley not to trouble to bring his things with him; but, in the usual way, I shall expect you to put on an evening costume," and before Rose could answer he had left the apartment.

As soon as he had closed the door Mr. Stanley went to her side, and placed his hand kindly on her shoulder.

"Poor wee wifie!" he said, gently, "it is

not a happy way to begin your married life, child. But try and be patient, and there will be brighter days for you in the future;" thus he tried to cheer her until dinner was ready.

Almost as soon as the meal was finished Mr. Stanley had to say good-bye to Sir Marmaduke and Rose, to catch the evening train to London.

After he was gone Rose pleaded a headache as an excuse for going to her own room; and when she had written a long letter to her husband she went to bed, and, being tired out, she slept until Fanny called her the following morning.

After a refreshing hot bath she dressed quickly, and arrived in the dining-room just as the bell was being rung for prayers.

After breakfast Sir Marmaduke told her she must find a way of amusing herself till dinner-time, as he was obliged to leave home, as usual, for the day; but that he would return at seven o'clock in the evening, accompanied by his son and grandson.

He then bid her adieu and left her alone. And very dull was poor Rose all those weary hours by herself. But they passed at last.

When evening came she put on one of the pretty costumes Mrs. Stanley had persuaded her to buy, and waited in the drawing-room for the return of the travellers.

Rose was a little curious to see her uncle and cousin, as she had heard of them from Mr. Stanley, and the description he had given of them had very much amused her.

Lancelot Staplehurst, the Baronet's eldest son, had married some twenty-two years before; and his wife, after living long enough to give him a baby boy, died, and Lancelot had returned to live with his father, and remained at St. Albans until his son, Eustace, had left school.

Then he had taken him abroad to see a little of the world, and they were then going to settle down to hard work, for the Baronet, feeling his increasing age, had determined to make Lancelot and Eustace partners with him at the bank, and as soon as they both thoroughly knew their duty, to live a life of ease at home.

As Rose was thinking of them she heard them arrive, and a minute later Eustace Staplehurst entered the room. She looked up with a somewhat saucy glance, and their eyes met.

"I beg your pardon," he said, beginning to retire when he had got half across the room, and saw her for the first time. "I really forgot you were here, or I should not have come in with my dirty boots on."

"Now that you have come so far suppose you shake hands with me before you run away?" said Rose, laughing; "for I suppose you are cousin Eustace—are you not?" she said, coming forward to greet him.

"Yes, I am Eustace, certainly," he replied, smiling, "and you must be my cousin Rose," and he took her hand in his and looked at the sweet, girlish face before him, and thought how beautiful she was. "Well, Rose," he said, after a few seconds' silence, "I hope you will be happy here; but I fear there is not much to make you so."

"No, not much," returned the girl, sadly; "but it was kind of Sir Marmaduke to invite me to stay with him, although I feel he did it out of a sense of duty, and not from love for my dear father."

"Oh, you must not say that!" replied Eustace, not knowing quite how to answer her, as he felt sure her words were true. "You see, your father and grandfather quarrelled, and they never made it up again; so they could not be expected to be very fond of each other."

"It was not my father's wish to keep up the ill-feeling!" said Rose, with flashing eyes.

"Perhaps not," returned Eustace, smiling at her. "But Sir Marmaduke Staplehurst never forgets or forgives if he is once offended."

"I am sorry for him," said Rose, scorn-

fully; "for he must wish he had forgiven poor papa, now that he has passed away, as he never really annoyed him by wrong-doing; his only offence was in marrying the woman he loved."

"My uncle's wife was your mother, Rose," said Eustace, gravely, "so I will make no more comment on the subject, save one. I do not believe in love; and I have never yet seen the woman for whom I would give up anything in the world!"

"I can quite believe it," returned Rose, satirically; "although you are too young to have had time to have gained much knowledge of love or women. And now don't you think you had better go and change your things, as it would be such a pity if the dinner was spoilt from being kept waiting, because you have been wasting your valuable time talking nonsense to me!"

"I will take your advice and go and dress," he answered, half amused, half crossly; and before Rose could reply to him he had left her once more alone.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU WILL LIVE TO REGRET HAVING SPURNED MY AFFECTION!"

DAYS passed into months, and Rose and her cousin were constant companions. Although Rose gave Eustace Staplehurst no encouragement whatever, and always did her utmost to avoid his society, she daily saw that he was growing too fond of her; and she felt with sorrow that when the knowledge of her marriage came to light, it would bring trouble into his life, and most likely turn all the good in him to evil, for he was a hot-tempered, passionate young fellow, who could not bear any disappointment with a patient spirit. And although Rose liked him better that she had at first thought possible, she cared for him only as a cousin, and she never for one second ceased to love her husband with her whole heart and soul, and gained her happiness solely by thinking of him at all hours, and longed for the time when they would once more be together.

Each day she wrote to him and posted the letter herself at the pillar-box close by Sir Marmaduke's house, and in return Alec Cunliffe used to write her fond and loving epistles, and get his kind friend, Mrs. Stanley, to direct the envelopes.

Thus time wore on till a year had gone by, and Eustace Staplehurst would be silent no longer.

"Rose," he said one evening, as they were alone together sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, when Sir Marmaduke and Launcelot Staplehurst had gone out for some hours to attend a parochial meeting, "Rose, I intend to make you listen to me to-night. I love you, cousin mine, and I am determined I will win you for my wife, although you seem to have thrown every obstacle in the way to prevent me! Now you shall listen to me," he said, passionately, taking her hand in his, and holding her firmly so as to prevent her leaving the room. "Rose, I have waited long enough, and I cannot, will not, put up with the way you are treating me. Surely, surely you must have a little affection to give me in return for all the love and devotion I bestow on you?"

"Oh, do not talk so foolishly!" said Rose, in a trembling voice. "Indeed I care for you as a friend and cousin, but love, I have none to give you; so let us drop the subject at once!"

"Is that the way you think you can silence me, Rose?" he asked, warmly. "No, I am not to be turned away so easily. I tell you that I love you, and my life's devotion shall be yours if you will only receive it; but I will be treated with this coolness no longer, and we must understand each other better in the future!"

"Yes, I want you to understand me, Eustace," replied Rose gravely. "You have

been very good to me ever since I came here, and you have influenced your father and grandfather to be kind to me, too, and I thank you for it truly, but I cannot marry you, and I would not do so if I could, for I have no real love to give you, nor could I be happy if you were my husband, as we are in no way suited to each other."

"Then is this your final decision?" asked Eustace Staplehurst, coldly.

"It is; but let us be friends still," said Rose earnestly. "Do you remember telling me the first day I saw you that you did not believe in love? Try and hold the same opinion now until you meet some good girl who is worthy of you, and can give heart for heart. I do not believe it possible to care for anyone who does not return your affection, and by-and-by you will thank me for leaving you free; and I shall hope to see you a happy husband in a few short years, with a devoted wife, who will worship you, and who will try and please you in all ways; and as I should do neither one or the other, you are better without me; so don't be angry, there's a good old boy!" and pressing the hand he still held, she tried to smile up at him, although she felt nervous, feeling sure there was trouble in store for her.

"Rose!" replied Eustace Staplehurst, bitterly, "if you mean what you say, you have ruined my life, and you will live to regret having spurned my affection. No, I will not be your friend; and unless you can tell me at once that you did not mean the words you have spoken, I will sooner or later have my revenge for the way you have treated me, and you will feel before long it is better to have a Staplehurst for a lover than an enemy!"

"I fail to agree with you," answered Rose, hotly. "If that is your character, I am better without you than with you. And now I think you can have nothing more to say to me," and taking her hand away from his firm grasp, she escaped from the room and shut the door, and running up the stairs she was quickly within her own apartment; and sitting down beside her bedroom fire, she began to think what she had better do next. She resolved to write to her husband that very night, and ask him to come and claim her as quickly as possible; and when her letter was completed, she threw her fur cloak around her and crept softly out of the hall door, and she sped down the drive at full speed; when turning round from the lodge gate into the high road, she came suddenly face to face with her grandfather and uncle.

"Rose!" said the former, sternly, "what are you doing out alone this time in the evening?"

"I was going to post a letter," she replied, "and as it is important, I hope you will let me take it to the pillar-box."

"Certainly not;" replied Sir Marmaduke, coldly, "and I am greatly surprised at you for wishing to be out after dark, and I must desire you to return home at once."

"If your letter is important I will post it for you, Rose," said Launcelot Staplehurst, not unkindly.

"Thank you very much, uncle," returned the girl quietly, "but I will not trouble you to-night, for to-morrow will do very well for me," and slipping the missive into her pocket she walked back beside her grandfather in silence, although he did hesitate to make the best of his time in telling her how wrong he considered her conduct; and as soon as she could get away from him she retired to her own room, and with Fanny's help she was soon in bed.

Fanny had been a great comfort to Rose during the twelve months she had been at St. Albans; and seeing she was in trouble she asked her if she could help her in any way, and, if so, not to be afraid to confide in her.

And little by little Rose told her all about the difficulties she was in; and Fanny, promising implicit silence, took charge of her letter and posted it before the early post the next morning.

Rose felt happier when she knew it was

gone, feeling sure that her husband would come for her as soon as possible. Rose was right; for the day after Alec had received her epistle he had made arrangements with their kind old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, to receive them, and having begged for a holiday, he hastened down to Silverlands to claim his wife.

On arriving at St. Albans he was shown into the drawing-room by the butler, and found Rose sitting by herself, with tear-stained eyes.

"Oh, Alec!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "I am so thankful you have come! You cannot imagine how unkind they have all been to me since I wrote to you," and she clung to him for comfort and support.

"My poor, little darling!" he answered, tenderly. "I am so grieved for you; but never mind, my precious girlie, it is all over now. We will never part again, dear love, and we will be ever so happy in the future," and placing his arm protectively around her, he kissed her again and again.

The door opened, and Sir Marmaduke stood before them, with rage and indignation depicted on his handsome face.

"What the deuce do you mean by that, sir?" he demanded, angrily. "I will allow no one to be on such terms with my granddaughter without my permission. I insist upon your not holding her!" he continued, getting more and more angry at seeing Alec had no intention of obeying him.

"I am sorry to annoy you, Sir Marmaduke," replied Alec Cunliffe, coolly, "but I hope you will forgive me when I tell you I can live without my wife no longer, and I have come to claim her!"

"Your what?" gasped the old man.

"My wife, sir, and I hope you will allow me to take her away with me this morning."

"Do you mean to tell me that you were married before you came down here, Rosie?" asked Sir Marmaduke, sternly.

"Yes, I was!" she answered firmly; "and grandfather, I hope you will forgive me for not telling you before; but I was afraid to do so in case I should vex you!" and, going to his side, she tried to take his hand, but he shook her off roughly.

"Rose," he said, bitterly, "I am utterly disappointed in you. I did think when I gave you a home that you might be a comfort to me; and I find, instead, that you have deceived me in every way you could. You have done your best to ruin your cousin Eustace's life, and when you get tired of his attentions to you, you coolly tell me you are a married woman, and wish to go away with your husband; but," he continued, turning to Alec, "will you be good enough to prove your marriage. So far you have given me no satisfaction on that point, and for all I know it may not be a true story!"

"Pardon me, Sir Marmaduke," replied Alec, proudly. "I should not come here to take away your granddaughter under false pretences. If you doubt my word I shall be forced to show you my marriage certificate, but I should rather not do so!"

"And I prefer to see it," answered the Baronet, coldly.

"Very well," said Alec, taking it from his pocket, "Here it is!" and he handed it to him in silence.

Sir Marmaduke looked at it critically for some time, then uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What! Stanley down as one of the witnesses! He shall answer to me for this! Well, Rose is your wife, Alec Cunliffe, and the sooner you take her out of my house the better, for I have seen enough of both of you. Good-bye," and he turned to leave the room.

"Good-bye, grandfather," said Rose, going to his side; "let me thank you for the care you have taken of me during the past year."

"I don't require your thanks!" he answered, coldly. "I can only regret I was ever weak enough to offer you a home," and pushing past her he left the apartment; and

giving orders to the butler that he did not wish to be disturbed till dinner-time he went into his study and locked the door.

"I am thankful that scene is over, darling!" said Alec, gently. "My poor wee wife, how pale you look! Do not fret, dear one, we have a happy future before us. Now run and get your things together, and let us be off as soon as possible."

"I have all my things packed, dearest, for I knew you would come!" said Rose, smiling.

"Of course I would, my darling! I only regret one thing, and that is that we shall be so poor."

"I do not mind poverty at your side, Alec," answered Rose, with a happy face, "and now I will go and dress myself. But how are we to get my luggage to the station?"

"I have a cab waiting for us outside, sweetheart, for I knew we could not carry all your belongings. Now, be quick, for I see we have only just time to catch the first train to London; and if we miss that we shall have to wait three hours."

"I will be as fast as I can," she replied; and she went up the stairs with fleet footsteps.

Fanny met her on the landing with a beaming smile.

"I hope I have done right, Miss Rose—I beg your pardon—Mrs. Cunliffe, but I can't forget the old name. But I was going to say Thomas told me that Mr. Cunliffe had arrived, and finding he had come in a cab, I have carried all your luggage down, and had it put into it on the sly, for I knew he would not go away without you; and I thought if all came to all, and Sir Marmaduke said you should not leave the house, you could pop out of the back door, and get off that way if everything was ready for you."

"How can I thank you, Fanny, for all your kindness to me?" said Rose, gently. "I only wish I could take you with me."

"If you will only have me to live with you I will leave here at once," said Fanny, eagerly.

"I should like you to come very much," replied Rose, with feeling, "for you have been very good to me. But we cannot afford to keep a servant yet, Fanny, and we intend to live in lodgings for the present; but if ever we can have you I will let you know, that is, if you always write and tell me where you are staying, and any letters directed to Mrs. Stanley's for me will be given to me safely. And now I must really go—good-bye," and shaking the girl kindly by the hand she hastened down to her husband, and very soon they were travelling towards London, hand clasped in hand, and a happy smile upon both their faces.

When they arrived they received a kind and affectionate welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, and a warm invitation to remain with them as long as they liked to do so.

CHAPTER V.

EUSTACE STAPLEHURST'S REVENGE.

As soon as Eustace Staplehurst heard of his cousin Rose's marriage and departure from St. Albans his indignation knew no bounds, and he silently determined to bring misery to the woman he loved. But how was he to do it? That was the question he asked himself again and again, and at length he decided that, to make Rose suffer, he must bring ruin upon her husband.

Having come to that conclusion he set himself to work to carry out his plan. He had not long to wait for an opportunity, as, the following morning, when Eustace and his father arrived at the bank a customer named Mr. Hamilton called and asked for his plate-box, which he had left in their keeping, and Eustace said he would fetch it for him.

After obtaining the keys of the "strong-room" from Launcelot Staplehurst, he called

Alec Cunliffe to help him, and proceeded to the underground room.

The plate-box with Mr. Hamilton's name on it was soon found, and Eustace told Alec to carry it away.

As soon as Alec's back was turned Eustace took up a bag of gold which contained one hundred pounds, and placed it in his pocket as quickly as possible; then he began to follow Alec.

"Wait a minute, Cunliffe," he said, "I have dropped the 'grille' key. Just put that chest down and see if you can find it for me."

Alec obeyed him, quite unconscious of the trap that was laid for him, and returned into the strong-room to search for the key, while Eustace remained outside, pretending to look for it there, leaving Alec alone in the strong-room for some seconds.

"I have found it," said Alec, at length. "You had dropped it among the plate-boxes," and handing it to Eustace, he looked brightly up at him.

"So you have run off with my cousin," said Eustace, with pretended friendliness. "Well, I hope you will both be happy!"

Alec Cunliffe regarded him in wonder, for Rose had told him of Eustace's revengeful words, and he had dreaded him as an enemy in consequence; but his kindly manner quite disarmed him, and, being a generous-hearted, forgiving fellow himself, he gave Eustace credit for being the same, and thought he must have regretted what he had said.

"Thank you very much!" returned Alec, impulsively. "It is truly kind of you to give us your good wishes; and I hope, if you do not mind small rooms, that you will come and see Rose and me sometimes when work is done."

"We will see about that later on," replied Eustace. "And now run up with that plate-box, and get the necessary receipt from Mr. Hamilton."

When Alec had disappeared Eustace finished locking the doors of the strong-room, with a look of hatred gleaming from his handsome eyes.

Then he proceeded to the lavatory, where the clerks all hung up their overcoats, and looking round the apartment he soon recognised Alec's on a corner peg.

"That is his, I know," he muttered between his set teeth, and, as if to convince him fully, there was one of Alec's handkerchiefs in the breast-pocket with his name on it. "Yes, there's no mistake!" he said, in a cruel voice; and taking the bag of gold he had extracted from the strong-room he placed it in the largest pocket, with Alec's handkerchief on the top of it to hide it should the coat be moved. Then he hung the coat with the full pocket against the corner of the room, so it could not be seen; and having completed his task he smiled bitterly.

"That will work your ruin, Alec Cunliffe!" he murmured. "And Rose, how she will suffer; and I am glad, for I have suffered too!"

Then hearing his father's voice close to the lavatory, he began to wash his hands with the nonchalant air he had of late assumed.

All went well as usual until the end of the day, when the money was counted over, when the loss of the hundred pounds was discovered, and everyone in the bank became anxious and excited.

"Who can have done it?" was being asked on all sides; but although the question was put again and again no satisfactory conclusion was ever come to.

"Mr. Stanley," said Launcelot Staplehurst, gravely, "I fear one of our own clerks must be implicated in this robbery, and no one must be allowed to leave the bank until they have been thoroughly catechised, and even searched. The innocent ones will gladly help us all they can, and will not resent the necessary inspection."

"Of course not," replied Mr. Stanley, excitedly. "We must not leave a stone unturned to find out who the scoundrel is. The

first things that had better be ransacked are the desks; after that the pockets of the clerks must be turned out. I am sorry—very sorry—such a thing should have happened, for I had perfect confidence in all our fellows, and I should be grieved to find out any of them capable of such gross misconduct. By-the-bye, who has been down in the strong room to-day? I know Mr. Eustace has been there several times, but has anyone accompanied him?"

"Yes, Alec Cunliffe has been there. Do you think he can have done it?" asked Launcelot Staplehurst, eagerly.

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Stanley, firmly. "I would stake my existence on his honesty."

"On whose honesty?" asked Eustace Staplehurst, entering the door, and hearing the manager's last words.

"On Alexander Cunliffe's," returned Mr. Stanley, decidedly. "I would never believe him guilty of any underhand action."

"I hope you are right," replied Eustace, a little bitterly; "but I have not much faith in the fellow myself. He has certainly behaved disgracefully to Sir Marmaduke."

"We must discuss that subject another time, Eustace," said his father; "the one case does not bear upon the other, and now to business. Stanley, I must ask you, as the manager, to begin the search, and my son and I will look over you;" and the three left the private office together.

The raid upon the desks was begun, and, as one by one was turned out, the clerks all gave a sigh of relief, for although they knew themselves to be innocent, they feared lest suspicion should fall upon them.

"There is nothing to be found here," said Mr. Stanley, exultantly. "What do you wish to do next, Mr. Staplehurst?"

"I think we had better go to the lavatory," he replied, thoughtfully. "The money may be secreted there."

"I think each clerk should be there as his pockets are searched," said Eustace, with a malicious smile; "it is only fair to themselves."

"Very well," replied the manager, "we will have a few at a time, so as not to have the lavatory too much crowded, as it is rather small."

One by one the pockets were turned out, until they came to the end of the room where Alec's coat was hanging. Involuntarily Mr. Stanley looked round with a smile at Alec before he touched it, as much as to say it was a matter of form looking into his, and Alec gave him a bright glance in return, and fell to wonder who would be found guilty, when suddenly Mr. Stanley's words aroused him from his reverie.

"This is some trick," said he, in an excited tone of voice. "Alec Cunliffe, the money is found in your pocket, but I will never believe you put it there!"

"In my pocket!" said Alec, turning pale to the lips. "Heaven knows I am innocent."

"You will have to prove it," said Launcelot Staplehurst, coldly. "At present, the evidence is dead against you."

Eustace Staplehurst had his revenge, and not one shadow of regret entered his mind as he saw how well his plot had worked. He regarded Alec with a heartless, cynical smile, and noted with delight how terribly cut up he looked.

"I conclude you did it when you were looking for the 'grille' key this morning," said Eustace, coolly. "I remember you were alone in the strong-room for some seconds, and had ample time to commit the robbery."

Alec faced his enemy unflinchingly. "Mr. Staplehurst," he said, firmly. "I never took that money, and I think you know I am speaking the truth."

For one second Eustace's eyes drooped beneath his steadfast gaze, the next he looked up defiantly.

"I should be very sorry to answer for your veracity," he replied, icily. "As my father

said just now, if you are innocent you must prove it."

The clerks in the lavatory were all standing with horrified expressions on their faces. They all liked Alec, and not one of them believed him guilty, although it puzzled them greatly how the gold ever came into his possession; and feeling sure of his honesty, they pressed around him to clasp his hand in silent sympathy, while Mr. Stanley wiped the tears from his eyes, which would gather there, however much he tried to drive them back.

"You can consider yourselves dismissed," said Launcelot Staplehurst, in an authoritative tone to his clerks; "except you, Cunliffe. You must remain a prisoner," and in another minute all Alec's friends had left him, save one, and that was kind old Mr. Stanley.

"Let me intreat you not to take proceedings against this poor fellow," he said, earnestly. "Such a charge against him would ruin his prospects, whether it was proved or no."

"And what do you wish us to do?" asked Launcelot Staplehurst, sarcastically.

"I want you to settle the matter privately," returned Mr. Stanley, with feeling. "Even if Alec was guilty, you would never regret dealing kindly in the matter; and, as I am certain he is innocent, I still the more beg you not to make the affair a public one."

"You were quite as anxious as we were just now to find the thief, Stanley; and, because it happens to be proved that Cunliffe is the offender, it is absurd that you should try and get him off the punishment he deserves!" said Launcelot Staplehurst.

"I doubt that he is the offender," replied Mr. Stanley.

"Who, then, do you imagine put the money in his pocket?" asked Eustace, impatiently.

"I should be sorry to say," returned the manager, gravely. "All I ask is that you will spare Alec, if not for his own, for Rose's sake, as it would break her sweet young heart if her husband was condemned!"

"That would make very little difference to us," replied Eustace. "She certainly has never consulted our feelings in any way."

"Say what you like about me," said Alec, with flashing eyes, "but I will allow no one to speak a word against my wife, as she is—"

"Silence!" said Launcelot Staplehurst, harshly. "I will have no further nonsense talked. Stanley, go and fetch a police-constable at once, and do your duty!"

"Excuse me, sir, but, at any cost, I refuse to go!"

"Oh! do you," said Eustace. "Then I will fetch one instead," and in another second he had left the room.

"You will regret disobeying me, Stanley!" said Launcelot Staplehurst, haughtily.

"I am sorry to annoy you," returned the manager, with much earnestness, "but I cannot help that poor boy on his road to ruin; and, for the last time, I entreat you to have a little consideration for him, and do not send him to prison until you have tried to find some further proof against him."

"We require no further proof!" said Launcelot; "and Cunliffe must be taken into custody at once!"

Alec felt as if the ground was going away from under his feet, and he became giddy and faint, and leaned against the wall for support.

"Take courage, Alec," said Mr. Stanley, kindly. "No one shall harm you if I can help it; and, as soon as you are taken to the police-station I will go and bail you out, and keep you safely until the time for your trial."

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was not long before Eustace returned with a police-constable; and, after hearing the charge against Alec, persuaded him to accompany him to the station without resistance, and Alec obeyed him with a bowed head and

heavy heart; as he thought of what Rose would suffer when she heard all the terrible story against him.

The police-constable did nothing that he was not obliged to do to increase Alec's discomfort; for he was so taken with his open manner and honest face that he felt almost sure that, although the evidence was dead against him, that he would prove himself innocent before the end of the trial. And, having a son of his own growing into manhood, of whom he was very fond, he felt sorry to have to give a helping hand in the arrest of the young fellow, feeling certain it would bring a great shadow into his life, even if it did not end seriously for him. But, whatever his personal ideas were, he was obliged to do his duty, as he could not deny that everything pointed to Alec's guilt; so he was obliged to take him in charge, and at length they arrived at the police-station; and, shortly afterwards, Mr. Stanley, true to his promise, came to stand bail for his friend.

It was getting late in the day, and there was much to arrange and many things to settle before Mr. Stanley could gain Alec his release, and for one night he was obliged to be detained, but the following day the good old bank manager had bailed him out for a month, and at the end of that time Alec was to be brought to trial.

Mr. Stanley succeeded in getting away from the bank in order to welcome Alec when he could gain his liberty; and, as soon as they had jumped into a hansom cab they clasped hands warmly.

"How can I thank you?" murmured Alec. "You are, indeed, a friend in need! and I don't know what would have become of me yesterday if it had not been for your kindness!"

"Don't mention it, my boy!" returned the old man, in a broken voice. "I love you as I should a son, if I had one! As it is, you must fill a son's place in my heart, and little Rose shall be my daughter!"

"My precious wife!" said Alec, with tears in his eyes. "It is for her I grieve more than for myself. How did she bear the news, poor darling?"

"Like the noble girl she is!" returned Mr. Stanley, softly. "I shall never forget the look of agony in her eyes when I told her the story, and she would not rest until I had taken her down to Silverlands to plead with Sir Marmaduke—and she did plead too! Her words were enough to melt hearts of stone, but they had no effect upon her relations."

"They seem determined to do their worst to you; and I can't help thinking that Eustace Staplehurst has somehow laid this plot for your destruction, for the expression of triumph on his face at Rose's grief was horrible to behold; and when he saw me gazing at him he changed immediately, and said to me it was a pity that nothing could be done for you, but that as there was no doubt about your guilt, they were obliged to take proceedings against you, if only as an example to the other clerks. I did not hesitate to tell him what I thought of his hypocrisy, and as Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Staplehurst heard me, there was a jolly row all round!"

"I expect there was," replied Alec, with a weary smile. "It is truly good of you to take my part, but I hope you won't get yourself into trouble by trying to help me."

"Oh! it does not signify to me one way or the other, for I am determined to be done with the whole concern and leave the bank. I told Sir Marmaduke to find another manager last night," said Mr. Stanley, indifferently.

"I am indeed sorry if I have caused you to make such a decision!" said Alec, gravely.

"It is nothing to do with you, my boy, so don't worry yourself on that account. The fact is, I am tired of the whole lot of Staplehursts and utterly disgusted with them. I have thought for a long while it was time for me to retire, as I am getting too old to care for hard work; and when this fuss began I saw a way of escape, for I have suggested

leaving in a quiet sort of way often before, and they have persuaded me to stay, and not liking to refuse them I remained. But now I'll be off with a high hand!"

"I hope you mind it as little as you pretend to do," said Alec, seriously. "But I can't help feeling if it had not been for me you never would have left. And now do tell me if there was much said about your being one of the witnesses to our wedding?"

"I should think there was!" returned Mr. Stanley, going off into shakes of laughter. "I can assure you we had over every subject that we could think of against each other, and I can safely say I never heard such a fearful 'storm' anywhere as there was last night at St. Albans. Poor little Rose's looks quite scared me, and I was glad to get her away."

"Poor little Rose, indeed!" repeated Alec, sadly. "I fear it was a terrible ordeal for her, and I think it was very noble of her to go!"

"A wife will never consider her own feelings if she loves her husband," said Mr. Stanley, earnestly; "and Rose cares for you, Alec, with all her heart. Now here we are home again, so jump out and ring the bell!"

In another second the hall door was opened, and as soon as they had entered the passage, Alec found himself clasped in Rose's arms.

"Rose, my precious darling, I have come back, thanks to Mr. Stanley's great kindness; but oh! my wife, Heaven only knows how long I shall be allowed to remain with you, for my trial will come on in a month, and who can say how that will terminate?" and Alec held her to his breast in a long and tender embrace, as if he dreaded even then to be forcibly taken away from her.

"Alec, my heart's darling, do not fear," replied Rose, softly, "for I hope and believe our dear old friend will save you yet. Has he told you his plan?" and she drew him into the comfortable drawing-room as she spoke, and making him sit in an easy chair, she knelt by his side and held his hands.

"How can he save me, dearest?" said Alec, kissing her fondly as he spoke.

"Here comes Mr. Stanley; he will tell you," said Rose, smiling up at the benevolent face which looked down at her.

"What am I to tell Rose?" asked the old man, brightly.

"Why, I want you to let Alec know how you think of saving him," returned Rose, eagerly.

"Ah! yes, we must manage it somehow, my boy; and we must make our arrangements as soon as we can; for, if once you are brought to trial, you will be convicted as sure as possible!"

"I fear there is no hope for me," replied Alec, sadly, "as everything points to my guilt. It cannot be helped, and I must face it, for I can see no way of convincing anyone of my innocence."

"No, you will never be able to prove that, Alec," returned Mr. Stanley, quietly. "Therefore, as I am not going to see you unjustly condemned, and little Rose's heart broken, I am determined to get you away before the end of the month."

"Impossible!" said Alec. "I am in honour bound to be present at the trial; and you, too, would have a fine price to pay for my disappearance, which would not be fair on you at all. And another thing, if I were to be missing, the whole world would say it proved that I had stolen the money, and was afraid to face the consequences. No, no; it cannot be done; indeed it cannot."

"I respect your feelings, Alec," replied Mr. Stanley, gravely, "but you must allow me to know best on this occasion, and look upon me as a father, and be guided by my advice. Firstly, knowing that you are innocent, I wish to save you from being unjustly punished; and, to my mind, you will be doing your duty far more by remaining by your wife's side, and helping and comforting her through life, than by wasting your youth within the walls of a convict prison, in penance for a crime that

you never committed. And as for the money, it is of no value to me, and I can well afford to pay what I shall be called upon to do; so don't add to the present troubles by making unnecessary difficulties, for Rose's sake, and mine."

Alec rose and clasped his hand warmly. "Mr. Stanley," he said, in a broken voice, "I can find no words to tell you how deeply I feel your noble conduct towards me. I will be guided by you for my wife's sake, although, personally, I should prefer to go through the trial, even if it were to end in my ruin. But perhaps that is mistaken pride on my part, so I will set my own feelings aside, and think of my precious Rose. What is it you wish me to do. Is it to escape out of the country?"

"No, I do not want you to do that, my boy," replied the old man, affectionately, "because if you and Rose were far away Mrs. Stanley and I would never see you, and that would not suit us at all."

"Where do you hope to hide us in safety?" inquired Alec, in astonishment.

"Well, the fact is I own a good deal of property in the pretty little village of Featherstone, and when my grandfather was alive he used to live in a beautiful estate there; and not only were there lovely grounds and park land that belonged to him, but also a thick, weird-looking old forest; that spread for some miles; in fact, right to the adjoining village named Forest Dean; and in olden days my grandfather used to have large shooting parties there. In order to treat his friends well, he had a pretty little bungalow built in the very centre of the forest, and gave a good luncheon to all who were out with him. To keep this cottage quite private, so that no tramps could find it out and take possession of it at night, he had it entirely surrounded by an enormously high and substantial mud wall, except in one place, where there was a very massive gate, which was kept locked."

"The mud wall was planted with angry-looking brambles all over it, and quantities of broken glass was stuck in it in all directions. Inside the wall a tasteful garden was arranged all round the bungalow; and altogether it was a picturesque-looking place."

"All went on very happily for some years, when, one day, my poor father, when he was still quite a boy, and did not really understand the management of a gun, accidentally shot my grandfather, and he fell down dead at his feet. From that time till this the forest has been deserted, and it has become a perfect wilderness, so it is to that little bungalow that I suggest taking you; and I fully believe you and Rose will live there in perfect safety, for I do not suppose there is a person living who even knows of its existence; and if you think you and Rose could be contented leading such a lonely life together we can consider the plan settled."

"I should be happy anywhere by Rose's side," replied Alec, placing his arm around her with a loving gesture; "but how could we possibly live? If I once hide myself I can never be a free man again, for I shall not dare to come out of my shell; therefore how could I earn anything to keep us with?"

"Do not worry yourself about that," said the old man affectionately. "It will be a great pleasure to me to provide for you both, and I will tell you how I will do it."

I will undertake to procure some cattle and some sheep from where I am unknown, and then turn them into the park land belonging to the estate; then if I get you a few chickens and a couple of pigs you will be well set up, and you must amuse yourself by attending to them. I know you won't like the killing part of the business, but that can't be helped I fear. Do you think you see a way of living now?"

"Yes, indeed, I do!" said Alec, gratefully. "It is more than generous of you; but do you really think it a safe project? Would not someone be likely to hear and see us there?"

"Not at all, for the place has been deserted for over eighty years; as, after my grandfather

was shot, the superstitious country folks set about that the forest was haunted; and except for a little path that was right on the outskirts of the wood, I have heard no one would walk in it at all. This path was a short cut between the villages of Featherstone and Forest Dean, and the people were allowed to pass through it as long as they did not wander into the wood to disturb the game. After the terrible accident there was no fear of the order being disobeyed, although after that no one would have found them out, as when my grandfather was carried home by his friends his wife, who was a delicate woman, was so shocked when she saw his lifeless body, that she fell down dead beside him. My father, though only a boy, inherited the whole of this parent's money and estate, and he took such a dislike to his old home, where he had spent such a happy childhood, that he dismissed all the servants, and sold the horses and carriages, and shut up the place; and taking his tutor, whom he was very fond of, with him, he travelled about for many years. It was not until he was nearly forty that he married and settled down, but nothing would ever induce him to go near the estate, nor would he let it. When he died he made me promise I would never live there, or allow anyone else to do so, having the absurdly morbid idea that as he had caused the death of both his parents no one should reside there again, feeling sure it would be a sort of sacrilege for anyone to enjoy living in the place where the dead bodies of his father and mother had laid."

"So—although I always thought it a terrible waste of the property, and of money too—I was obliged to bow to my father's last wishes. When my own mother passed into rest I did not like the idea of leading an idle life—as I was but a lad in those days, and felt the time hang heavy on my hands, so being a friend of Sir Marmaduke Staplehurst, I asked him to take me into his bank, and he did so. I rose at length from being a clerk like yourself to a manager, and as I did not marry early in life I saved nearly all of my private income. I am glad I did so, as in my old age I have enough for myself, and plenty to spare; so you need not shrink from accepting a little help from me, which I assure you it will cause me a great deal of pleasure to give you."

"I shall never be able to show you how grateful I am," said Alec, brightly, "and I fear it will give you a great deal of trouble."

"Not at all. You will have the trouble, not me, for I fear the bungalow will be in rather a dilapidated condition by now, although it was built well in the beginning. The foundations were of bricks, and the woodwork of the hardest oak that my grandfather could procure, so I daresay you will be able to patch it up; and I think you had better go down for a few days, or even a week or two before Rose, and get things comfortable for her, and I will meet you at the old place and show you all over it. The stables of the house will do for the cattle, and you need never be seen, because there is an enclosed walk from the park to the cottage in the wood. But to prevent any detection you had better disguise yourself as a farm-labourer; and then if you were noticed by anyone entering the park with me it would not call attention, and I will arrange for the animals to arrive by night, when all the inmates of Featherstone and Forest Dean will be fast asleep. Money will do anything, and I will pay them handsomely for their work if you don't mind sitting up for them to let them in!"

"I don't object in the least," replied Alec, with a smile; "and if Rose does not dislike the idea of leading so isolated a life, I am sure we shall be truly happy in our quiet little home!"

"I should be contented anywhere by your side, Alec, darling," said Rose, tenderly; "and if you were taken away from me and imprisoned for years it would break my heart. I think our dear kind old friend is more than good to us!" and placing her arms

around Mr. Stanley's neck she wept tears of sorrow and of joy.

CHAPTER VII.

HIDDEN IN THE FOREST.

WITHIN three weeks all was arranged, and Rose was ready to join Alec in his cosy retreat; everything had been done that was possible for their comfort. Mr. Stanley had spared himself no trouble or expense in providing things for their daily use. As far as the household furniture went, he had allowed Alec to choose what was useful to him out of his grandfather's mansion which had never been dismantled; and, to avoid attracting attention, he had gone himself and carried the things over with Alec to the cottage in the forest.

As soon as it was in a fit condition to receive them, and as Alec was a good carpenter, he found but little difficulty in making it tenable, and when all was finished Mr. Stanley clasped Alec's hand with great tenderness.

"Heaven bless you, my boy!" he said, gently, "and may you some day be proved to be the innocent man you are. Until then try and be contented in your quiet home."

"I shall be more than contented with my darling Rose by my side," Alec answered, readily. "The only thing that troubles me is that you will be put to so much annoyance over my disappearance."

"Don't worry yourself about that," returned Mr. Stanley, smiling at him. "You will be missing, and I can't tell them what has become of you."

The following day Rose left the bank manager's house to enter upon her new life. She had a very touching parting with Mrs. Stanley, and then took her seat beside Mr. Stanley in the brougham with tear-dimmed eyes.

"How can I ever thank you?" she repeated again and again as they went along. "You have saved Alec from being shut up in prison, perhaps for years. Now, although he will still be considered guilty, he will not be separated from me, and we shall be happy in each other's love."

"Yes, indeed! I believe you will," answered Mr. Stanley, gently, "and now I am going to tell you of one thing which I have not mentioned before, except to Alec; and that is, that I have found some one to go down with you to your new home, who I feel sure will be a great comfort to you."

"Found someone to go with me!" said Rose, with astonishment. "Surely my kind old friend, that was not wise! Remember how people talk!"

"Fanny Somers won't talk," answered Mr. Stanley, smiling; "and it is she who is going to live with you!"

"I am very grateful to you," replied Rose, "for I like Fanny very much. My only fear is that she will grow dull in so lonely a place."

"I do not think she will if you are kind to her," returned Mr. Stanley, brightly.

The train at length steamed into the station, and Mr. Stanley hurried them into a carriage. He accompanied them as far as Willeeden Junction, where he placed them in another train; and having written them out full instructions, he left them to finish their journey alone, so as to return to his own home before the hour the bank opened in order to be at his post as usual, and not to call remark by his absence.

He was only to be manager of the bank for two days longer, as Sir Marmaduke had found another to succeed him. He was glad to think he should be able to resign his duties before Alec's disappearance should be really discovered.

Then he had made up his mind to take Mrs. Stanley to Paris, and, by a thorough change, he hoped to regain health and strength both for his wife and himself, as the worry of

the past three weeks had greatly upset them both. They determined to travel about for some months, and then look for a comfortable residence in the country, where they could settle down and end their lives in peace.

As soon as Rose and Fanny arrived at the station of Forest Dean they took up their heavy travelling bags and walked towards the Park.

The fresh morning air seemed to give them strength, for they struggled along with their burdens bravely, and only laughed happily when they were forced to put them down to rest.

The contents of the bags were not the only things Mrs. Stanley had provided for them, as she had sent a large box of underlinen and flannels down by Alec when he had gone to the new home. When Mr. Stanley had paid him a visit, he, too, had taken as much as he could carry in the way of changes of garments for Alec, and many things for the girls also, so that they were really provided for at least a couple of years. The kind old people promised before the end of that time to bring them some fresh clothing.

The luggage that Rose and Fanny were carrying was principally boots and shoes, numberless reels of cotton, and all the requirements of a ladies' work-box, and various other little comforts that they had thought might be useful to them at the last minute.

So, baggage in hand, they walked on and on down the picturesque country lanes, and all the way they only passed a few children, who did not leave off playing to take any notice of them.

When they arrived at the north entrance of the Park there was no one in sight anywhere; so they knocked gently, and in another second Alec had opened the gate and the two girls entered in. As soon as the key was turned in the lock they all knew they were safe from detection.

"Rose, my wife," said Alec, joyously, "I am so thankful you have come. Nothing can part us now, my darling! and I think we shall be very happy in our quaint little home in the wood."

"I am sure we shall," replied Rose, brightly; "and I feel truly glad to be shut away from the cruel and revengeful world."

"So am I, dear love!" answered Alec, quietly. "My only fear is that you will miss the little comforts you have been accustomed to in your old life!"

"Indeed, I shall not, dear!" returned Rose, smiling. "And, now that Fanny has decided to join us, I shall not even have any work to do."

"Yes, Fanny has been very kind; and I hope she will never regret coming to us," said Alec, turning to her.

"I am sure I never shall!" replied Fanny, heartily; and the look in her eyes, as she clasped Alec's proffered hand, showed that she had meant what she had said.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

TWENTY years passed away, and Alec and Rose still lived in their secluded home. They had never ceased to be happy and contented in each other's love.

There had been great excitement when Alec's disappearance was first discovered.

Poor old Mr. Stanley was questioned and cross-questioned by everyone on all sides; but he had ever given the same answer, and that was that "He could not say what had become of him, or of Rose either."

Certainly, nowhere could they be found. Detectives were after the wrong people in all directions.

Sir Marmaduke offered a large reward for anyone who could give sufficient evidence for their identification, but without any good effect, for no one had recognised Alec travelling into Forest Dean in his splendid

disguise, and Rose had passed unnoticed in her thick lace veil.

As not a soul knew or remembered that the dilapidated old mansion in the deserted park at Featherstone belonged to Mr. Stanley, it did not enter anyone's head to have the place searched; so at length they grew tired of talking about the missing pair.

After awhile fresh subjects began to interest them, and Alec and his wife were well-nigh forgotten.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley had then travelled about for two years, and when they returned they managed to get unseen into the forest.

They were most gladly welcomed by Rose and Alec, who with great pride introduced them to their baby-boy, who was a fine little fellow of one year old, and the darling of his parents' heart.

The Stanleys, too, were delighted with him, and offered to adopt the child, and bring him up as their own son, if they would spare him to them. So it was decided that, as soon as he was five years of age, Mr. Stanley should take him away to France, and have him thoroughly educated. When he entered manhood, Mr. Stanley promised that, if he lived, he would see that he entered a suitable profession; or, if he died, to entrust him to some suitable guardian.

So, when the specified time arrived, Mr. Stanley again visited the place of his forefathers, and took away little Harold from his devoted parents.

Their lives were more desolate than ever after his departure; but, knowing that it was for the child's good they would not complain, and clung even closer to each other for comfort and support.

Thus years rolled by, and Harold Cunliffe, known at his school as Ralph Conway, was nineteen.

As his kind old benefactor was still alive, he asked his permission to pay a long visit to his parents before he set to work to earn his own livelihood as a civil engineer.

So one evening quite late he tapped at the door of the bungalow.

When Alec and Rose discovered who their visitor was they received him joyfully; and faithful Fanny, who had never left them for a single day, bustled about, and quickly got one of the rooms ready for him to occupy.

Harold had remained with his parents about a month, when, after shutting up the cattle for the night to protect them from a severe snowstorm that had commenced unexpectedly, he was returning to his home, when he suddenly heard the voice of a woman calling out as if in distress.

Anxious to assist whoever it was, he climbed over the high wall, and was led by the sound of the cries until he grew quite close to them; when, to his astonishment, all was silent, and he could hear nothing but the sighing of the wind in the trees.

"Where are you?" he called again and again, but there was no reply to his question, for it was really old "Nurse Ann's" voice that he had heard calling for help, and, as we already know, the cold and anxiety had proved too much for her. She had fallen down dead upon the ground, just as Harold Cunliffe came to her aid.

Elsie Granger could not answer him either, for she was still insensible, wrapped up in the good old woman's warmest things. So, finding that no one replied to him, Harold took some vestas from his pocket, and, having struck one, he lighted the lantern, he had carried in case he should require to use it while he was attending to the cattle, and he felt glad he had it with him, when he found he was obliged to be in a part of the forest that he really knew nothing about.

When once he had lighted the lantern he began his search in earnest, and greatly distressed was he to find "Nurse Ann" lying dead at his feet. At first he did not realise that her spirit had fled, and he knelt down beside her and rubbed her briskly for some time; but at length the truth dawned upon

him, and he found her heart had ceased to beat.

"Poor soul!" murmured Harold, gently. "I wish I had been in time to help you, but it is too late now," and he arose from his knees and determined to look around and see if there was anyone else who required assistance too, and before he had gone many steps he found Elsie leaning against the tree so carefully wrapped up by the loving hands that were now still in death.

Harold's heart beat fast as he looked down at the beautiful face, and when he noticed how she was covered over with loose clothing he guessed it had been the act of the dead woman; and he wondered what relation they were to each other, that she had sacrificed her life for the young girl's sake, and stooping down once more, he did all in his power to bring back animation to the senseless form beside him, but with no good result. Her pulse was beating feebly, so he knew that Elsie was alive.

At last, finding he could not restore her to consciousness, he lifted her in his arms, and made up his mind to carry her home to his mother to nurse. So he walked slowly back with his burden until he reached the high gate that led into their private garden, and having with difficulty unlocked it and fastened it up again, he arrived at last at the door of the bungalow.

"Mother, dear!" he said, earnestly, "I know you will not refuse to do a kind action. I have found this poor girl in the forest, benumbed with the intense cold, and I have brought her home to you to save her life!"

Rose and Alec turned pale as they heard his words, for both knew that they could no longer conceal their place of abode; for when once the stranger, whoever she might prove to be, became sensible, she would be obliged to be returned to her friends, and they would be the first to talk about the people who had saved her life, who lived in the mysterious cottage in the forest.

They felt that they were no longer safe, but they were both too kind-hearted to frame their thoughts into words, and seeing how really ill Elsie was, they did all in their power to restore her to animation, and she at length grew warmer, and opened her eyes; but the cold had been too much for her, and she did not become sensible enough to know where she was, and, except for continually moaning, she showed no signs of life.

Rose and Alec placed her in their own bed, and waited on her with great care; but it was late on the following afternoon before they could make her realize that she was among strangers. When she did she became very nervous and agitated; but Rose's gentle ways soon reassured her, and she gradually grew more composed. Her first thought was of her parents, and her anxiety that they should be told of her safety was so great that Alec promised to take her home that very night.

Elsie had quite forgotten in her weak state that they were away in Scotland when she had left Featherstone Manor, and for a time she was satisfied, and lay quite still, trying to remember what had really happened to her. Little by little it all returned to her mind, and she sat up in bed, looking at Rose with wide, open, frightened eyes.

"Where is Nurse Ann?" she questioned. "I am certain Ann was with me in the forest when we lost our way! What has become of her?"

"She is quite safe, dear child!" answered Rose, softly; "we have done all we can for her, and you must not disturb her to-night, as she is fast asleep!"

"But is she in this house?" asked Elsie, eagerly, "for I should like to see her so much!"

"No dear," returned Rose, with feeling. "We had no room for her here, so we were obliged to make other arrangements for her, and I can assure you she will not want for anything!"

"I am glad of that," replied Elsie, sinking

back on her pillow, exhausted from talking; "and now I will rest until you can take me home, for I want to go to-night, although I have lately remembered that my parents were away; but very likely they have been telegraphed for by the servants when we did not return, and if so, they are nearly sure to have come back to Featherstone Manor and they will be terribly anxious about me!"

"Of course they will," answered Rose, readily, "and my husband and son will carry you home in a chair as soon as it is dark, so as not to excite curiosity about you."

"Oh! let me walk," said Elsie, sitting up again; "indeed, I am able to do so;" but when Elsie tried to dress herself, with Rose's help, she found that she was not nearly so strong as she had imagined, and she very gratefully accepted the offer of the chair, and was soon on the way to her parents' house, borne along by the powerful arms of Alec and his son.

It was quite dark soon after they had started, and as the snow was still lying thick upon the ground they met but few people.

They arrived at Featherstone Manor almost without having been observed, and immediately after ringing the bell, the door was opened by the old family butler, who in a second recognised Elsie, and rushed in to tell Mr. and Mrs. Granger the welcome news, for they had a few hours before returned from Scotland in terrible grief about their lost child; and when they heard that she had come back to them they hastened out with joyful hearts to greet her. They found her still sitting in the chair, and being carefully unwrapped by Alec and Harold, for they had bound her carefully on to the seat and back, to prevent her falling off in case she felt faint by the way.

"Elsie, my darling!" exclaimed her mother, throwing her arms around her, "thank Heaven you have been restored to us!" and she kissed her fondly, with tears falling from her eyes.

"And thank you for bringing our dear girl home to us," said Mr. Granger, looking first at Alec and then at Harold; and it struck him even then what a strange likeness there was between the two men, although Alec was dressed in a smock frock, and Harold as a gentleman. When he, too, had welcomed Elsie back, he invited her charioters to come into the dining-room and take some refreshment; but this they declined to accept, as they were anxious to return to the forest as soon as possible, but they were obliged to remain for a certain time to answer the questions as to where they had found Elsie, and also as to whether they could give them any information about Nurse Ann; so Alec asked if they could be allowed to speak to Mr. Granger privately. Seeing that they had something particular to say to him, Mr. Granger took them into his study, while Mrs. Granger led Elsie away straight to her own room, and persuaded her to go to bed at once, as she noticed that the girl was weak and ill, and in no way equal to sitting up to tell them of her adventures.

CHAPTER IX.

RECOGNISED.

It was not long before Mr. Granger had learnt the whole story from Alec and Harold Cunliffe. While thankfulness filled his heart at having Elsie restored to him, he could not help feeling deep regret that faithful Nurse Ann had so nobly died in trying to save his daughter's life; and he begged Alec to let him send some undertakers for the body on the following day, so that he could give her a quiet and suitable funeral. Alec was obliged to consent to his doing so, although he said he would prefer to bring her to the opening of the wood himself with Harold's help, for he felt that if the men from the neighbouring town were to discover his "Retreat" he could no longer hope to escape identification,

although so many years had passed since he had been forced to take refuge there.

"If you wish to bring her to the opening of the wood, pray do," said Mr. Granger, looking at Alec with curious eyes; for it struck him most forcibly that he had seen Alec before, although he could not recollect where it had been. "But may I ask why you are so anxious that no one should come to your house?"

"Mr. Granger," said Alec, earnestly, "my son has saved your daughter's life. All I ask in return is that you make no inquiries as to who I am or where I live, as I wish to remain in seclusion for private reasons of my own. And to-morrow we will carry your nurse to the beginning of the forest and place her beside that lately fallen oak tree, where you and the undertaker can find her. If you will only allow me to do so, you will grant me a favour."

"Yes," said Mr. Granger, after some moments' thought. "I will ask no questions concerning you. Whatever your secret is, it is no business of mine to seek to know it. I can only thank you again for your kindness to my child!"

He held out his hand to Alec, who clasped it warmly, and after a few more words of gratitude from Mr. Granger, Alec and Harold took their leave.

But a few minutes after they had left Featherstone Manor, they met a man with a lantern, who was just returning after a fruitless search for Elsie; and noticing that Alec and his son had just come out of the manor gate, he raised his light to their faces, and in a second more started forward and caught Alec by the arm, for Eustace Staplehurst had discovered his prey at last, and this time he did not mean to lose sight of him.

"Cunliffe," he said, in a trembling voice, "where have you sprung from? I thought you were abroad or perhaps dead!"

"Mr. Staplehurst," said Alec, firmly, "so many years have passed since you tried to ruin me, knowing me to be an innocent man, that I hope you will allow me to part from you as a stranger, and that you will in no way seek to injure me further. I feel surprised that you have recognised me with my white hair and farmer's dress!"

"Recognised you!" said Sir Eustace, excitedly. "As if I could possibly forget you! Your features are not changed, and your face has haunted me day and night ever since I last saw you—first in my wild desire to track your footsteps and work my revenge upon you to the utmost of my power for robbing me of the girl I loved. Then, as years rolled by, and I lost my grandfather and my father, and I was left alone in the world, I became tired of hunting for you."

"Then I met with an accident out driving while I was staying with my great friend, Mr. Granger, and I was forced to remain in his house many months before I could be moved to my own home."

"While I was there—and it was only two years ago—I became a softer and, perhaps, a better man, thanks to the gentle influence of Mrs. Granger and her daughter, who waited on me with so much care and tenderness that I learnt to wish I had led a different life."

"Then for the first time I began to regret my conduct to you, and I have been miserable ever since. But now that I have met you, I will do what I can to make reparation to you for all that I have made you suffer; and if you will only forgive me, I may yet be happy and see you so too!"

"Am I to understand that you are willing to proclaim my innocence to the world?" enquired Alec, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, I will even do that," said Sir Eustace Staplehurst, wearily.

"Then, indeed, I am thankful that I met you," said Alec, joyfully; "not only for my own sake, but for Rose's and my son's!"

"Oh, father," said Harold, earnestly, "I am so—so glad! How grateful mother will be that her prayers have been answered at last, and that you will be free once more!" and he

clasped Alec's hands lovingly, being too overcome to speak further words.

"Heaven bless you, my boy!" said Alec, in a voice trembling with emotion. "This is a happy day for us all, and we must hasten home to your mother to tell her our good news!"

"Do you live near here, then?" asked Sir Eustace, in astonishment.

"Yes; I need no longer keep our retreat a secret. We live in a cottage in the wood—"

"In the wood!" echoed Sir Eustace. "I have been searching there all day for Miss Granger, and have never seen it!"

"Possibly not, because it is behind a very high bank which no one can get over."

"I saw it," said Sir Eustace, "and it puzzled me greatly. I was going to persuade Mr. Granger to send some men to-morrow with long ladders that we might look over it and see what was on the other side, in case his daughter could have got round there in any way."

"If you had made your search there to-day you might have found her," said Alec, smiling; "but you are too late now, for Harold and I have just taken her home."

"You have!" exclaimed Sir Eustace, joyfully. "Is she safe and well?"

"Safe, yes," returned Alec. "But I regret to say she is still ill from the effects of her long exposure to the cold."

"Poor girl!" said Sir Eustace, with feeling. "But I am thankful that you found her in time to save her life!"

"It was my son who found her," replied Alec; "and as soon as she was able to be moved we carried her home."

"I am truly glad!" returned Sir Eustace, warmly. "Now, Harold, as you are my cousin, I hope you will shake hands with me, and help me to persuade your father to forgive me before we talk on other subjects."

"I am sure my father will say everything that is kind to you," replied Harold, with feeling, taking his proffered hand; "won't you, father?"

"Yes, my boy. I will forgive as I hope to be forgiven," replied Alec, gently. "Now, Sir Eustace, perhaps you will tell me who stole the money from the strong-room?"

"I did it?" replied Sir Eustace, nervously. "I wanted to work your ruin, and I fear I have wrecked your life in consequence!"

"I have not been unhappy," returned Alec, kindly, "for I have had the best wife that man was ever fortunate enough to gain; and if you like to return with us at once, I will show you our little nest, and I will tell you how we have managed to live all these years," and the three returned to the cottage together.

When Rose heard all that they had to tell her, her thankfulness knew no bounds; and when Sir Eustace pleaded for forgiveness, she granted it at once, and peace and goodwill was restored between them.

CHAPTER X.

FOUND DROWNED.

SIR EUSTACE STAPLEHURST WAS really anxious to undo the mischief he had done. He was even willing to publish in the newspapers the whole account of his treachery; but Rose and Alec generously stepped forward, and prevented him from doing so, knowing that it would cause him to be despised and shunned by all his fellow-men.

So only a few were told the real truth; and for the rest a short account in the *Times*, proclaiming Alec's innocence, and ended by saying the real criminal had been found; but, as so many years had elapsed, the affair had been privately settled.

Thus the matter ended, with the exception that Alec's friends clustered around him to welcome him once more among them, and no one seemed able to make enough of him or of his faithful wife Rose.

As for Mr. Granger, as soon as Sir Eustace Staplehurst confessed to him the whole of his story, he sent to them to beg them all to come and remain at his house as long as they liked.

They gladly accepted the invitation, feeling it would be better to begin their new life at once.

So, as Fanny was asked to accompany them, the little cottage in the forest was soon deserted, although Alec went every day to attend to the animals until he found a suitable man to take his place.

The first friend they wrote to, to tell of their change of fortune, was kind old Mr. Stanley and his sweet old wife.

The two travelled down to Featherstone Manor without delay, to show them how they rejoiced at the turn things had taken.

Seeing how fond they all were of each other, Mr. and Mrs. Granger persuaded them to stay with them too, so Featherstone Manor was soon overflowing with bright hearts and happy faces.

As for Elsie, she was like a little sunbeam among them all, for she quickly recovered from her chill under medical treatment.

She seemed as if she could not make enough of her friends who had saved her life.

A great intimacy sprang up between her and Harold Cunliffe, which soon deepened into love; but Harold, feeling he had no fitting position to offer her, never told her how he longed for her to share his life.

Sir Eustace Staplehurst, having watched them both very closely, determined to set himself aside, and do his best to help the son of the woman he had once loved so passionately.

So, finding Harold alone one day, he told him in confidence that he had learnt his secret, and he wished him to know that he had that morning made his will in his favour, leaving him his own personal money, which he had inherited from his mother, with the exception of one thousand pounds a year, which he left to Harold's parents; and ended by saying that, as he felt he should not now live very long, he should be glad to leave him in a position to ask for Elsie's hand, which he would be; since, at his death, as the great-grandson of Sir Marmaduke, he would inherit his title and estate, this privilege having been granted to the female branch of his family in the past of long ago, failing male issue.

Leaving Harold in "the seventh heaven of delight," he went into the park-land alone, if not a happier certainly a better man, for he had at last conquered himself, and set his own happiness aside, for he had made up his mind to try and win Elsie for his wife.

When he heard she was lost, he had come with greatest speed down to Featherstone Manor to help search for her.

During those hours of uncertainty he learnt how dear she had grown to him; and he determined, if ever he should find her, to do his uttermost to be worthy of her love. But when he saw how much Harold cared for her he left off paying her any attention; and Elsie, thinking she had mistaken his friendship for love, allowed her heart to be caught at a rebound, and gave it without any hesitation into Harold's keeping as soon as he pleaded for it with all the earnestness of his nature.

Everyone at Featherstone Manor was delighted at the match, for Mr. and Mrs. Granger had taken a great fancy to Harold; and Alec and Rose gladly welcomed Elsie as their daughter for their boy's sake.

The day passed happily by, but Sir Eustace Staplehurst did not return. And as the night wore on, and still he did not come, everyone thought he had been called away unexpectedly on business, and had not had time to say good-bye to them.

But the following morning one of the gardeners found him in the lake drowned, but whether he had fallen in by accident, or had purposely taken away his own life no one ever knew.

Six months afterwards Sir Harold Cunliffe-Staplehurst settled down at St. Albans with Elsie as his bride, and he persuaded his father to become manager of the bank, as the former manager had died suddenly about that time.

So he and Rose returned to London, and resided at the bank house, and Mr. and Mrs. Stanley went to live with them, feeling glad to have someone to love and take care of them in their old age.

Fanny Somers, having promised to marry the man whom Alec had left in charge of all the cattle in the park, was presented with the bungalow as her wedding present, and with all the animals on the estate.

So she and her husband decided to live in the forest, and their home was no longer unknown to the people around them; for the wood was thrown open to the public, and a part of the high bank was knocked down, which showed the pretty cottage behind; and as Jack Compton, who was Fanny's husband, had resided all his life at Featherstone, and was liked and respected by all who knew him, there was seldom a day that some of his friends did not come to see him and his gentle wife; so the happy pair, who lived in perfect union with each other, never had time to feel dull or lonely.

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

PARADOXICAL.—A man always feels put out when he is taken in.

If you want to be well informed, take a paper. Even a paper of pins will give you some good points.

"ALWAYS aim a little higher than the mark," says one philosopher. "What! Kiss a girl on the nose? Never."

"Do you mean to tell me that Joe is really dead? That was the last thing I expected of him." "Well, it was the last thing he did, wasn't it?"

CUSTOMER (to Mr. Isaacstein): "The coat is about three sizes too big." Mr. Isaacstein (impressively): "Mine friend, dat coat make you so proud you vill grow into it."

YOUNG WIFE: "Horror! See here, sir, your dog has run off with a whole sponge cake I left outside to cool." Tramp: "Don't worry, mum. That dog's tougher'n he looks. He kin eat anything."

QUEEN VICTORIA has sent to the Glasgow exhibition two table napkins manufactured from yarn spun by her own hands. That is what they say, but this may be only a little yarn spun from somebody's head.

CARKER (in hotel corridor): "Let's get out of here, Barker." Barker: "What's the matter?" Carker: "Those two big men are having such a violent discussion that I'm afraid it will end in a fight." Barker (carelessly): "No danger of that. They're both pugilists."

A CRUEL BLUNDER.—Mr. S. (who has recently married a young wife): "Why, good-evening, Mrs. Brown. Where is your husband?" Mrs. Brown (who has seen her best days): "Oh, he wouldn't come; I never can get him out." Mr. S. (who is always blundering): "Well, perhaps if he had a young, fascinating wife he would be tempted to come out oftener."

WANTED THE CONVENIENCES.—A Detroitier who returned from Colorado the other day was asked his opinion of the country. "Too new," was the brief reply. "How?" "Why, too far apart." "What? The towns?" "Yes, and the pawnshops. I got broke, and had to wait three days and travel 120 miles on the bumpers of freight cars before I could raise £4 on my watch. Too new—altogether too new."—*American Paper.*

A PROFITABLE PRACTICE.—CITIZEN (to physician): "You have a large practice among the wealthy and fashionable class of people, haven't you, doctor?" Physician: "Oh, my, yes. Why, many of the finest monuments and tombstones in Woodlawn cover former patients of mine."

BRIDGET'S LOGIC.—Miss Gladys: "You appeared very abruptly with your errand a while ago. You must not come so suddenly into the room when Mr. Smithers is spending the evening with me." Bridget: "Sudden! And is it sudden ye call it, and me at the keyhole full three-quarters of an hour."

GOOD WORKS NEEDED.—When Professor K. reached the rostrum for prayers he found his watch two minutes slower and himself as much later than he expected. Looking at his watch, he exclaimed: "I shall have no faith in my watch after this!" "It is not faith, but works, you need," was the quick response of Professor J.

A PATIENT IN PERIL.—A country physician tells the following good story of his early struggles in his profession: "I insinuated to a reverend friend how advantageous it would be to me if he would notice my being called occasionally out of church; and he did. Dr. Grosgrain, my chief competitor, also insisted on receiving clerical attention. The next Sunday a boy came running into the church and whispered to my opponent, who left immediately. The pastor, who was about to begin his sermon, hesitated, and then said: "'Brethren, let us pray for a sick man who is in great danger—Dr. Grosgrain has been called to see him.' This settled the doctor, and left the field to me."

ROOSTERS.

THERE is not on the whole horizon of ov liv natur a more pleasing and strengthening study than the rooster. This remarkable package of feathers has bin for ages food for philosophik, as well as the simple curious mind. They belong tew the feathered sels denominated poultry, and are the husbands ov menny wives. In Utah it is considered a disgrace tew speak disrespectful of a rooster.

The flesh ov the rooster is very similar tew the flesh ov the hen; it is hard to distinguish the difference, especially in yure soup.

Roosters are the pugilists among the domestik burds; they wear the belt, and having no shoulder tew strike from, they strike from the heel.

Roosters, according to profane history, if mi edukashun remembers me right, were formerly a man, who came suddenly upon one ov the heathen gods, at a time when he wad't prepared tew see company, and waz, for that offense, rebuilt over into the fust rooster, and was forever afterward destined to crow, as a kind ov warning. This change from a man akounts for their fighting abilities, and for their politeness tew the hens. There is nothing in a man a woman admires more than his reddyng and ability tew smash another fellow, ann it iz jies so with a hen. When a rooster gets licked, the hens all march oph with the other rooster, if he ain't half so big or handsome.

It iz pluck that wins a hen or a woman. There iz grate variety ov pedigree among the rooster race; but for stiddy bizness, give me the old fashioned, short-legged Dominique rooster. When they walk, they alwus strut, and their buzzums stick out, like an alderman's bread-basket. This breed is hawk-coloured, and haz a crooked tail on them, arched like a sickle, and az full ov feathers az a new duster.

But when you come right down to grit, and throw all outside influences overboard, there aint nothing on earth, nor under it, that kan out-style, out-step, out-brag, or out-pluck, a regular Bantam rooster.

They alwus put me in mind ov a small dandy, prakticing before a looking glass.

JOSH BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

THE latest addition to the Queen's jewels is the personal portion of the Women's Jubilee gift. Several handsome ornaments have been submitted for Her Majesty's approval, but she has decided to have—not a large something in the way of jet, as might have been expected, but a necklace of pearls and diamonds made from a design by Princess Beatrice. The pattern represents a wreath of trefle, in allusion to the three kingdoms, it is said, over which she rules; but surely it will be taken for the shamrock, only that it is not in emeralds.

THE Princess of Wales was the greatest comfort to her sister-in-law and her nieces in Berlin, by her gentle and tactful sympathy, and everyone has felt glad to think they have had so sweet a consoler with them, and that the Prince of Wales remained at Berlin to be of such service and support to his bereaved relatives as was possible at such a sad moment.

It was pretty of the Prince and Princess of Wales to undertake the personal charge of the German Governesses' Association floral memento sent over for the Kaiser's funeral, knowing what a pet charity this is with their sister Kaiserin Victoria, who was exceedingly pleased with the wreath. It is a monster circle of white lilies and violets, inscribed with the words (in German) "To our dear Kaiser, from the Governesses' Association in England."

MANY are the conjectures as to where the widowed Empress Victoria will reside. The latest rumour is that she intends going to Wilhelmshöhe, near Cassel, the scene of Napoleon III.'s captivity. But it seems probable that she will first of all remain quietly at Potsdam for a while; and afterwards very likely visit England. The latter plan is, of course, urged upon her by her Royal mother; but it is quite possible that Victoria of Germany feels that she can best bear her sorrow at first alone with her daughters, and without the well-meant, but not always efficacious, attempts at consolation of other relatives.

THE following is the text of the three despatches received by Empress Victoria on the death of the Emperor Frederick:—

From Windsor: "Your beloved husband bears with him to the tomb the last smiles of my life.—VICTORIA."

From Rome: "When everyone weeps, the sorrow of each is diminished. Be comforted, the whole world weeps with thee.—MARGUERITE."

From Madrid: "Heaven is pitiless; the two men who but a few short years ago sat at my table—young, vigorous, full of health—Alfonso and Frederick, are no more.—CHRISTINE."

HER MAJESTY is never tired of showering presents on those who take her fancy. Little Miss Victoria Campbell, the infant daughter of the Rev. A. Campbell, of Crathie Manse, is now the happy possessor of a magnificent coral necklace ornamented with gold medallions and valuable pearls, which the Queen gave her before leaving Balmoral. Princess Trixie, not to be outdone, acted the rôle of a matter-of-fact young mother, and sent the lucky cherub some embroidered frocks.

THE Crown Princess of Sweden has taken up the occupation for which her native country is justly renowned—viz., wood-carving—as a pastime this summer. She is taking lessons from a lady who is one of the best wood-carvers in Stockholm, and devotes a good deal of time and pains to mastering this beautiful art.

THE very latest invention of fashion for the benefit of womankind is a handkerchief with a little buttonhole in the centre, through which a powder-puff is attached. No more dropping this so necessary contrivance of comfort and beautification; no further necessity for searching pockets and reticules; no anxious waiting for opportune moments.

STATISTICS.

THE world's insect species number 320,000, according to Dr. J. A. Lintner, 25,000 belonging to the United States. About 25,000 of them prey upon the productions of man, 7,000 or 8,000 being fruit pests, and no less than 210 being known on the apple-tree alone.

FOR a thousand years, at least, Chinese has been the most used language on the globe. Professor Kirchhoff, of Halle, finds that it is now spoken by over 400,000,000 people; Hindustani, which comes next in extent of use, by over 100,000,000; English, by about 100,000,000; Russian, by over 70,000,000; German, by over 57,000,000; and Spanish, by over 47,000,000.

THERE are in America over 4,000,000 farms, large and small. They cover nearly 20,000,000 acres of improved land, and their total value is something like £2,000,000,000. These figures are not, of course, very comprehensive. They simply convey the idea of vastness of area and equal vastness of importance. The estimated value of the yearly product of these farms is between £400,000,000 and £600,000,000.

GEMS.

IN matters of conscience, first thoughts are best; in matters of prudence, last thoughts are best.

HOPES are the chief blessing of man; and that hope only is rational of which we are sensible that it cannot deceive us.

POWER is so characteristically calm that calmness in itself has the aspect of power, and forbearance implies strength.

IT is a happy thing for us that this is really all we have to concern ourselves about, what to do next. No man can do the second thing.

THERE are many persons who are too ready to criticise others' work or conduct; and the only idea of criticism they have is to overlook merits and detect blemishes.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

MOCK DUCK.—Take a round steak; make stuffing as for turkey; spread the stuffing on the steak; roll it up and tie it; roast from half to three-quarters of an hour.

DRESSING FOR SALAD.—Two raw eggs, one tablespoonful of butter, eight tablespoonfuls of vinegar, one-half teaspoonful of mustard; put in a bowl over boiling water, and stir until it becomes like cream; add salt and pepper to suit taste.

ICE PUDDING.—Put one quart of milk into a stewpan with ½ lb. of white sugar and a stick of vanilla; leave it to boil ten minutes. Mix the yolks of ten eggs with a gill of cream, pour in the milk, then put it back again into the stewpan, and stir until it thickens, but do not let it boil; strain it into a basin, and leave it to cool. Take 12 lb. of ice, pound it small, add 6 lb. of fine salt; mix together quickly, cover the bottom of an ice pail (a common pail will do), place the ice pot in it, and build it around with the ice and salt. This done, pour the cream into the pot, put on the cover, and never cease turning until the cream becomes thick; move it from the sides occasionally with the ice scoop, to prevent it getting into hard lumps. The mould to be used to set the pudding should be put on ice to get quite cold. It is then filled with the cream to the level, and three or four pieces of white paper wetted with cold water are placed on it before you put on the cover, which should fit very tight. The mould is then buried in the same mixture of ice and salt used for freezing the cream in the first instance, and is left until wanted, when it is dipped in cold water, turned out on a napkin, and served.

MISCELLANEOUS.

WHAT is called the drudgery of any employment will be most faithfully performed by the one who takes the most comprehensive view of the whole work. Seen in its true relations, it obtains a dignity which saves it from contempt, and the superior man will willingly perform many a task from which a lesser one would shrink as being beneath him.

THE earnest striver who tries to live the life of someone else, and fails, finds but little energy left to live his own, and often sinks down into comparative apathy. He whose sole aim is to reach some special height, when he finds that his powers are inadequate, will care but little to climb any farther. Thus much loss of needed power and effort results from following impossible ideas. The individual does less than he can, and both he and society, through him, are losers.

LEGENDS OF FEATHERED MUSICIANS.—The poor cuckoo, whose mournful cry sounds so desolate in the quiet wood, is always mourning for the death of a beloved brother. The cuckoo was originally a beautiful young maiden. She caused her brother's death unintentionally, and was changed into the bird whose sad cry is an expression of her bitter grief. The owl was once a beautiful girl. She was a baker's daughter. One day, a good man passing by, asked for pieces of bread. She refused it, and as a punishment was changed into an owl. The nightingale only sings at night. This was not so formerly. One night a nightingale fell asleep, and a vine grew around its feet so it could not get away, and it died. Since then nightingales never dare sleep at night.

ROULETTE PLAYERS' INGENUITY.—A large sum was won years ago by a small company of players in the following manner: An ingenious mechanic having come to the conclusion that it was impossible to maintain a cylinder in such perfect working order that it should not tend a little to one side or another, and thus favour certain numbers more than others, haunted the rooms for months, and was rewarded by finding that his conclusions were right, and that certain numbers, at certain tables, appeared in the registers he kept with undue frequency. These numbers the members of his company set to work to back, and with such success that they had won very largely indeed before the proprietors discovered their secret. It is said that after a quarrel among themselves, one of the party gave information as to their mode of procedure; but, be this as it may, the cylinder of every roulette board is now removed and tested after each day's play, and no more money is to be made in the manner described.

WROUGHT OF SILK AND GOLD.—The newest thing in jewellery is a curious combination of textile fabrics with the precious stones. A chrysanthemum pin has a top made in imitation of the flower from a mass of yellow floss silk. Something like a hundred small yellow diamonds stand out upon it, being mounted on invisible gold wires buried in the floss. A daisy pin presented to Miss Terry the afternoon before she sailed on the *Saale* was constructed in the same way. White silk formed the flower and small white diamonds made it sparkle. The stem of the daisy, some two or three inches long, was of green gold copied from nature. A bunch of hops is as successful a design as any yet tried in this way. Emeralds are the jewels peeping from green silk. The "art" flowers introduced this season are sometimes jewelled. An art rose to pin on the corsage or after the lately revived fashion, to put in the hair, imitates in its texture the natural rose leaf. Even when you touch it you are supposed not to discover that it did not grow in a garden. Even for fastidious people the art flowers are meant to be satisfactory and economical substitutes in the ball room for the real thing. Diamond dewdrops destroy the illusion, however, though they are too pretty to frown upon.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—O—

- C. C.—No personal knowledge of it.
 L. V.—Advertise in the daily papers of your city.
 ROSE.—It will be necessary for you to obtain a divorce under any circumstances.
 G. S.—The medicine should be patented in the first place, and then well advertised.
 B. N.—The red gold of jewellers is made up three parts of gold and one part of copper.
 B. N.—Joseph Jefferson, the American actor, was born in Philadelphia, February 20th, 1859.
 E. F. M.—The height of the Washington Monument, Washington, is 555 feet. This includes the capstone.
 F. M. (Birmingham).—The portraits are those of three good-looking and intelligent young men apparently in a fair position in life.

J. W. O.—Take a cup of strong cold beef-tea every morning, and before sipping a glass of port wine with an egg beaten up in it.

C. M. G.—The church of St. Sepulchre, built in imitation of the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, is in Cambridge. It was consecrated in 1101.

BELLA.—1. Yes. 2. As you have left out the number of feet and only given the inches we are unable to inform you. 3. Constant practice form good models.

JOHN BELL.—1. Not necessarily, but it should not be commenced at an early age. 2. Speak very slowly and deliberately. 3. Not quite up to the standard. 4. Fair.

G. P.—The Act of Parliament can be obtained at a very small cost from Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode, the Queen's Printers, East Harding-street, Fetter-lane, London.

F. W.—1. Rolling stock is everything which rolls over the railway, including locomotives and tenders, passenger and luggage trains. 2. Sleeping carriages were first used in 1858.

V. S.—If you possess a thorough knowledge of book-keeping, you may be able to get a situation. It should be borne in mind that good handwriting is not the only requisite of a book-keeper.

A. B.—Blackheads, or fleshworms, may be got rid of by bathing the face night and morning in a tolerably strong solution of powdered borax and water. Also by avoiding very rich, fat, or greasy food.

DISCONTENTED.—You have no cause to be so with your hair. It is a very handsome colour, whatever some people may tell you. We decline to give hair dyes, as they are always injurious in the long run.

ROBERTUD AND LILY OF THE VALLEY.—1. She must wait until he declares himself. 2. Will our fair correspondent kindly write the name of the affliction for which she wishes a cure plainer, as we cannot decipher it?

E. L.—When a lady's brother brings a friend to his house, she should, after a proper introduction, assist in entertaining the visitor. The fact of his being a friend of the brother should be a sufficient guarantee of his respectability.

TWO WALLFLOWERS.—1. Would be a brunette. 2. Also a brunette. 3. It is a matter of taste. 4. Tied with blue black; tied with white salt brown. 5. We believe the Queen's surname, if monarchs can have surnames, would be D'Este-Guelph.

B. N.—Breccia (Italian) is a compound rock composed of angular fragments, which appear to have existed in other formations. The Potomac marble, of which fine specimens are seen in the capitol at Washington, U. S., is a breccia of marble, sandstone, and other minerals found in the new red sandstone formation, where it crosses the River Potomac. It is a difficult rock to polish. It is pronounced bretch-ya.

H. B. F.—Moths deposit their eggs in the early spring, and carpets should be taken up and well aired and beaten every year at that time. Woollen clothes and furs, after having been thoroughly beaten with a thin rattan, should be wrapped up in newspapers and put away in a trunk lined with cedar wood. Some use tobacco strips and camphor, but the latter is said to impair the beauty of furs, turning them light.

D. R. O.—"Fortunatus" is the title of a collection of popular tales, the earliest known publication of which took place in Augsburg in 1509, though it includes fairy lore and popular legends of an earlier period. They teach that wealth is not sufficient to secure permanent happiness, which is illustrated by its ultimately ruining Fortunatus and his sons, who were in possession of boundless riches, and of a talisman enabling them to attain all their desires. The conception was long supposed to be of Spanish or English origin, but the Germans claim it.

W. J. B.—In regard to what you term "the original discoverers of America," there is no evidence that the Northmen, though they visited Greenland as early as the tenth century and planted a colony there, ever reached farther south than New England, or penetrated a score of miles into the interior; but a mass of very valuable information will be found in Baldwin's "Ancient America," which is essentially a manual embodying within a moderate compass the substance of what is fairly known respecting the civilised races which occupied a large part of the American continent before its discovery by Columbus. However far the reader may agree with or dissent from the author, it will be found a very interesting work.

H. N.—Bathe the face in powdered borax and water.

F. H.—They are recoverable in the county court. You can sue for the balance due.

PRIMROSE.—1. The 19th April, 1871, came on Wednesday. 2. Light colours would suit you best.

ALBA.—The earthquake to which you refer occurred in New York and vicinity on August 10, 1884.

M. C. C.—Gentiles is the name by which the Jews distinguished all other nations from themselves.

JUMBO AND JIMBO.—1. You had better attend a class. You would acquire the knowledge in half the time. 2. Any school arithmetic.

T. A. R.—Your case illustrates the folly of childish engagements. You are still a minor, and too young to become engaged to be married. The best course is to explain the matter to the young lady as you have to us, and be released.

A. V. V.—The notion that it is not good to eat oysters in any month that has not an r in it is very ancient—at least two hundred and eighty-nine years old. It is to be found in a work published in 1699, and the sentence reads as follows: "It is unseasonable and unwholesome, in all months that have not an r in their name to eat an oyster."

OUR SUMMER TIME.

My thoughts go back, and the years like shadows
 Slip from between us and melt away;
 And I am out in the sunny meadows
 Raking and turning the new-mown hay;
 The robin swings on the bough above me,
 The brook strays on with a lazy tune;
 And I think; if only my love would love me,
 Life were sweet as a day in June.

I look away to the low eaves, abating
 Under their riotous wealth of flowers,
 And sigh, with a heavy heart's repining—
 "If only that dear little cat were ours!"
 But, out in her garden, Mistress Mary,
 Busily snipping a gadding spray,
 Sweet as her posies, but so contrary,
 Deigns but rarely to glance my way—
 (My stars! how she flirted with Tom that day!)

But when the haying was done and over,
 And hollows were pink with the aglantine,
 And all in the breezy, blooming clover
 Bees were drunk with honeyed wine,
 Her words were kinder, her ways were gentler
 As winds that dimple a summer sea;
 And I said, in a rhapsody sentimental:
 "At last she is learning to love but me!"

And oft at the old lane's greenest turning,
 Just at the orchard's thorny bound,
 We met, when the first faint stars were burning,
 But somehow Thomas was always around.
 She smiled and sighed, and ave's young splendour
 Touched her brows with a sadness sweet;
 Her words were soft, and her heartless tender—
 How should I know her a heartless cheat?

The days drift on; in the green and mazy
 Trysting-places of that dim old lane,
 Tall and alim as a white field daisy,
 Mary stands at the barn again;
 I hear the wind thro' the hedges stealing,
 The crickets chirp in the low swamp lands,
 And Tom in the dew-wet grasses kneeling,
 In clasping and kissing her two white hands.

The years roll back, and the moon's soft glory
 Silvers the gloom where I sit apart,
 And love is a sweet, unfinished story
 Whose moral is written upon my heart;
 And I cherish thro' all life's cark and scheming
 This golden maxim, without alloy:
 Trust no woman, whatever her seeming,
 Who dangles two strings at her bow, my boy!

E. A. B.

L. D. D.—Maria Louisa, the second wife of Napoleon I., was at first, as has been said, appalled at the idea of marrying him, having been brought up to execrate his name, but she finally resigned herself to her destiny, and the civil marriage took place at St. Cloud, and the religious ceremony was performed next day at the Louvre by Cardinal Fesch. She did not join her husband at Elba, never saw him again, and evinced no interest in his fate.

C. R. P.—Otters are plentiful in British America, where thousands are killed every year for their fur. They are found in almost all parts of the world. Their food is chiefly fish, their paws are webbed for swimming. Their fur in summer is almost black, but in winter it turns to a beautiful reddish brown. It is generally short, thick, and fine. In China, mandarins of high rank wear otter fur as a mark of office. The sea otter is much like the seal, with a head like that of a cat.

C. F. W.—Lester Wallack was born in New York city, Jan. 1, 1819. He made his first appearance on the stage in the Broadway Theatre, there, at its opening, Sept. 27, 1847, as Sir Charles Goldstream in the farce of "Used Up." For several seasons he was known as "J. W. Lester." He was a prominent member of Burton's company in the Chamber Street Theatre from 1850 to 1859, when he became stage manager in his father's theatre in Broadway and Broome Street, at the same time playing the leading parts. He subsequently became proprietor of "Wallack's Theatre."

M. C.—The mixture or preparation for "japaning" leather consists simply of linseed oil and Prussian blue, the last coat being of linseed oil and lamp-black, put evenly over the surface as it lies spread out on a table. If any machine has been made to supersede the hand in this part of the work we do not know it. In the blacking of skins a mixture of ox blood and acetate of iron is now very often used.

A. N. T.—The founder of the present imperial line of Russia was Michael Romanoff, who was elevated to the throne in the year 1613. Peter the Great was his grandson, and the present Czar is circumstantially descended from the same Romanoff line. There have been so many assassinations, and such strange admixtures in the Romanoff family, that it is difficult to say just exactly where the line of descent has actually run.

A. J. G.—Bucephalus was the charger of Alexander the Great. He was called Bucephalus because he had a black mark resembling an ox's head on his forehead. His colour was white. The story concerning the horse is, in brief, this: A Thessalian offered him for sale to Philip, but as none of his attendants or courtiers could manage him, the king ordered his owner to take him away. Alexander expressed his regrets at losing so fine an animal. Philip said he would buy the horse if his son could ride him. Alexander made the attempt and succeeded, but the animal would never suffer any person to mount him but Alexander.

D. C.—The regulation yachting dress is a serge petticoat, plain and straight in front, and very slightly draped at the back. This may be of goblin blue, while the jacket bodice must be of a darker blue, turning away to show the white flannel or silk vest, which is itself rolled open, with a turn-over collar in front, under which is tied a scarlet silk handkerchief. There is a wide belt about the waist, and sometimes a Tam O'Shanter cap instead of a sailor hat, while an indispensable part of the costume is a double-breasted reefing jacket, to be used when the sun goes under a cloud, or when there is a strong chilly wind blowing.

AMV.—Greenwich is situated on the right bank of the Thames, five miles south-east of St. Paul's Cathedral, London. It has numerous churches, schools, factories, iron-steamboat yards, rope-walks, and engineering establishments, but its chief objects of attraction are its hospital for seamen, and its observatory, which was erected by Charles II. for the advancement of navigation and nautical astronomy. It is charged with the transmission of time throughout England by means of electromagnetic circuits. The hospital occupies the site of the royal palace known as Greenwich House, in which Henry VIII., Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth were born. It was a favourite residence of the last named sovereign.

C. W. F.—The tuberose is regarded as one of the most important of florists' plants. The bulbs were formerly imported; some from Holland, and some—the finest—from Italy. The native country of the tuberose is not positively known, some ascribing it to the East Indies and others to Mexico, but it is treated like a native of the tropics. Its excessive fragrance renders it always in demand, and for early winter flowers the plants that have not yet bloomed in the open ground are taken up and put in the greenhouse; and bulbs of the previous year's growth are carefully kept until August, when they are planted under glass. The forced plants are rarely potted, but set in a bed of earth made upon the greenhouse bench.

FREDA.—1. To pickle mushrooms, take two quarts of small freshly gathered ones. With a sharp pointed knife peel off carefully the outside skin, and cut off the stalks closely. Prepare eight little bags of very thin muslin, and tie up in each bag six blades of mace, six slices of root ginger, and a small nutmeg broken small, but not powdered. Have ready four glass quart jars. Lay a bag of the spice in the bottom of each; then put in a pint of the mushrooms, laying a second bag of the spice on the top. Have ready, also, some cider vinegar, very slightly seasoned with salt, allowing to each quart of vinegar a tablespoon of salt. Fill up the jars with the vinegar, finishing at the top with two tablespoonfuls of sweet oil. Immediately close up the jars, corking them tightly, and putting thick paper, or tying a piece of leather or bladder over the corks. 2. To dry mushrooms, free them from the skins and cut off the stalks. Dry them gently in a moderate oven, and put them away in tight cans. Be sure to keep them from dampness. 3. To stew mushrooms, wash them, cut off the ends of the stalks and peel them; put them in a stewpan without any water, and season with salt and pepper; add two ounces of butter rolled in two teaspoonfuls of flour to every pint of mushrooms; cover them closely, and let them simmer slowly until they are soft.

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